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South  
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*The chapter entitled "The Pleasure of Reading the Bible" may also be had in separate form, bound in paper boards, or in limp leather.*

# The Pleasure of Reading

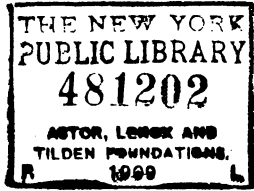
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TO MY WIFE AND  
MY FRIEND

4.1.25

Nov 2/09

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## CONTENTS

I	The Pleasure of Reading	3
II	The Pleasure of Reading the Bible	33
III	The Pleasure of Reading Poetry	83
IV	The Pleasure of Reading Shakespeare	143
V	The Pleasure of Reading Novels	195
VI	The Pleasure of Reading History and Biography	259
	List of Books	312
	Index	323



I

**THE PLEASURE OF  
READING**



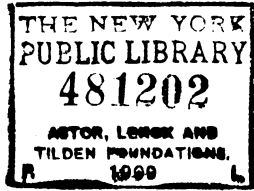


## THE PLEASURE OF READING



**P**LEASURE is the effect produced in us by the mind's conscious realization of joyous experiences. The mind is invigorated and enlarged after the experience, and there follows an awareness of personal alertness, and self-poise, and independence. In the laboratory of the mind sense impressions are transmuted into spiritual experiences which leave the spirit refreshed; the experiences have been converted into food for the soul's growth and strength. In listening to music, in seeing good comedy and fine tragedy, in dancing, in the contemplation of beauty in nature and art, in hearing excellent singing and noble speaking, and in look-

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**TO MY WIFE AND  
MY FRIEND**

#155

Nov 8/09

## *THE PLEASURE OF.*

The beginner in the art of reading (for reading is also an art, since it gives pleasure, and requires care) will glance idly over these words and, mayhap, wonder why the poet addresses the urn in such language. Why a bride? And why a still unravished bride? And why a bride of quietness? And what is meant by calling it the "foster-child of silence and slow time"? But he who reads for pleasure will know that Keats was a poet, a man who shaped his thoughts into language, so that the thoughts should be there, on paper, for others to think as he himself thought them. The words, therefore, are not chance words, put in for effect or for the making of rhyme; they are the inevitable symbols suggesting definite thought-forms. Such a reader's mind will become stimulated to an activity in

## *READING*

harmony with Keats's own thoughts. The words will conjure up in him a whole history of the thousands of years during which the urn had lain buried in the quiet of an earthly grave. It is now found again as perfect as when it left its maker's hands, still unbroken, even though it had been for all these centuries the bride of quietness, the foster-child of silence and slow time.

While it was lying nursed in the arms of silence Rome had conquered Greece; Cæsar and Augustus had reigned; Virgil and Horace had sung; Goth and Vandal had overcome Rome; Gaul and Britain had become nations; Mahomet and his followers had made of Byzantium the centre of a new humanism, and had carried their flag to the pillars of Hercules. The Dark Ages had dispersed before the sun of the Revival of Learn-

## ***THE PLEASURE OF***

ing. America had been discovered; a German Empire founded, and a new civilization born in the Western Hemisphere. Napoleon had devastated Europe, and the feudal system had been destroyed. Civilizations had come and gone; nations had been made and unmade; the gods even had passed away as fleeting migrants in the world of human thought; kings and queens had lived their little lives and become less than shadows. During all this time the urn was being nursed as the foster-child of silence and slow time; and now, after the centuries had passed, it comes to us, the bride of quietness, still unravished, to bear witness to us of the genius, the high thought, the noble enterprise, the happy doings and sylvan enjoyments of the Greek people.

Is not this the pleasure of reading?

## *READING*

What music, what painting, what acting, what oratory, is comparable in its pleasure-giving power to this reading? It is the very acme of enjoyment, fulfilling every quality in us that makes for alertness, poise, and self-possession. It is the awakening of the latent forces within us for accomplishment, not for the sapping of our vitality; it is a rejuvenation of the spirit, not its decay.

“The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come; and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.” These are the words used by a poet-king of Israel to tell us that Spring was come again. Are these merely words? Do they not cause the imagination to create for itself a very continuity of delightful experiences? They send us living over again our own springs, those seasons in our own lives when we,



## *THE PLEASURE OF*

too, loved and were loved; when we also dwelt in Arcadia and felt the blood of life flowing in our veins, urging us to deeds of high enterprise, and making us aware of the life-impulse within us, when the heart was young.

There is no pleasure in mere reading. I mean in that reading that demands of the eye only a casual receptivity for the simple purpose of forming fleeting images, more or less pleasing or interesting. These images chase each other to a very weariness of our mental powers—if, indeed, we really employ our mental powers with them. They form an ever-moving panorama, the pictures in which stay not with us long enough for reflection to assimilate; they shift on to fresh pictures that lose their definition by being merged into the others that press on for cursory acquaintance. This

## *READING*

is the abuse of reading. Pleasure here is become the excitement of an orgy. It is a species of mental debauch, and leaves the mind powerless to venture on its own creative activity. For the essence of the pleasure of reading is the stimulation received for our own creative imagination.

When Shakespeare makes Titania command her fairies to "pluck the wings from the painted butterflies, to fan the moonbeams from his sleeping eyes," the real pleasure comes to us from the picture made by our own creative imagination. We actually see the fairies catching the beautiful butterflies and fanning the moonbeams from the eyes of the slumbering Bottom. The picture is of our own making. The marvel, of course, lies in the wonderful power of Shakespeare to give us a set of words which not only suggest the picture, but

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

steep it in its native atmosphere, so that we are, in very truth, living the dream of this midsummer night.

Reading for pleasure is thus an exercise for the mind. To find that exercise at its best we must seek the best opportunities, and the best opportunities are provided by the best writers. These turn us to a right intercourse with abiding things. They appeal to the best in us and challenge our ability. We must be ready to wrestle with the angel, and not to leave him until we shall have overcome him; and when we shall have overcome him he will bless us.

Who are the best writers? That is the question we have set out to answer. Charles Lamb, writing of Books and Reading, confessed that he dedicated no inconsiderable portion of his time to other people's thoughts. "I dream

## READING

away my life," he said, "in others' speculations. I love to lose myself in other men's minds." He meant by this that books aroused in him the creative activity of the imagination. "Books think for me," he said. In other words, books gave him the material on which he could exercise himself. That which did not do this he would not dignify with the name of a book. He had a prejudice against the volumes which "no gentleman's library should be without"—the Histories of Josephus, Paley's Moral Philosophy, Hume's History, Gibbon's Roman Empire. These were "things in books' clothing," he said, "intruders into the sanctuary, thrusting out the legitimate occupants." But then Lamb's was of that rare order of mind that found its own sphere of reading by an intuitive perception of what was *for* him. Books

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

to him were the disembodied spirits of friends re-embodied as volumes. He loved a "kind-hearted play"; an essay emanating from a mind that revealed itself by gentle divagations and simple-hearted ambulatoriness; a biography that opened the heart of the biographer as it did the life of the person written about; a poem in which the aroma of a gracious heart moved the poet's fancy to find the heart's reflex in the things of the world; any writing, indeed, which was the expression of a genuine personality and its relation with God and the things that are God's, provided the expression were the result of direct experience.

Herein lies the real pleasure of reading—to touch hands with those who, having truly lived, have had the divine gift to translate their experiences into communicative words so that we, sitting in

## READING

our homes, or lying on the hillsides, may be transported in imagination to live in joy what they may have passed through in pain. Pleasure is transportation; it is a veritable carrying over of the spirit in the stress of a joyous experience. In reading we re-live the dead and the past. It is not the David and Jonathan of the Bible of whom we read as loving each other; it is our better selves blossoming in fine impulses toward our friend. It is not a fictitious tale of Faust and Mephistopheles; it is our own soul living the temptation and finding its strength through the imagined experience. It is not Captain Dobbin, or Joe Gargery, or Father Goriot who is the hero of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, or Dickens's *Great Expectations*, or Balzac's *Père Goriot*; it is we ourselves. We are again children who see the real

## ***THE PLEASURE OF***

in the ideal, and for whom the make-believe is the actual. And who shall say that children are not the very types of pleasure-knowing beings? Has it not been said that only such as they shall enter into the Kingdom of God?

“Ah!” you sigh; “we have been doing nothing but read for the better part of our lives and yet we have but rarely experienced this pleasure of which you tell us!”

That is because you have either read that which could not bring you pleasure, or you have read too much. It is not the quantity but the quality of your reading that counts in life. The advertised fiction for “summer reading” may enable you to talk blithely to your companion at the dinner table of the latest thing in popular esteem; but will it enable you to commune with yourself in any one of the

## *READING*

many lonely hours of each day's life? Will it have transported you in delight to self-expression? Will it have endued your shy spirit with courage to do and to be? Perhaps once or twice, or maybe thrice, at the most, you may have known this pleasure. For the rest your reading has drugged you and made you drunken. You have read not to make time, but to waste time; not to know you are alive, but to forget ennui. This is the debauch of reading and leaves you a prey to discontent.

You do not, indeed, require to read much to know the pleasure of reading. Sometimes a sentence will be enough, and you will lay down the book, steeped in an ecstasy of imagination. The test of a real book is that it enables you to find yourself; it sends your mind adventuring, and delights your heart in that



## *THE PLEASURE OF*

you have found another who has felt as you feel and who has delivered himself. Such books cannot be read always; they rebel against a companionship that breeds contempt. They will entertain you to a continual intimacy only when you shall have climbed the heights of your own mental pilgrimage, and have freed yourself of your soul's burden. Only those "books in books' clothing" are careless of how you approach them and indifferent as to who you may be. The tons of "printed stuff" ground in the literary mill and made up by publishers to look like books,—these are but dead things, and being lifeless they can never impart life. You will find them always but Dead Sea fruit, filling the mouth with ashes.

The real books are very particular as to whom they will know. If they do not

## *READING*

like you, you may clothe them in purple and gold, they will always hide themselves from you. If your spirit is attuned to them, they will be welcome in homespun or common cloth. It is the nature of great books to be silent and uncommunicative if you do not come to them with your mind dressed in its best and fit to enter the presence of a king of thought. They will then not question your dress, your wealth, or your social standing. They will but ask of your spirit—"Are you ready?" If it is, they will come to you as friends, with outstretched arms; they will give you of the riches of their inexhaustible treasure-houses; they will charm you with the magic of their music; they will endow you with the gifts of knowledge; and they will bless you with the strength of their wisdom.

## THE PLEASURE OF

“The habit and power of reading with reflection, comprehension, and memory all alert and awake,” said John Morley, “does not come at once to the natural man any more than many other sovereign virtues come to that interesting creature.” None the less, the virtues of the habit and power may be acquired and cultivated with no great exertion on the part of any person possessing average intelligence and moved by the diligent desire to be something more in himself than a money-making drudge. A language may be learned by taking its vocabulary in daily homœopathic doses. In exactly the same way, a half-hour devoted each day to the reading of one of the masterpieces of literature, say, Wordsworth’s *Lines Written Above Tintern Abbey*, or a book of the *Iliad*, or a play of Shakespeare’s, or a chapter

## READING

of the Bible, will, in the course of a year, give to your life of action or business a new meaning, and quicken your sympathy and moral sense to what the highest culture should aim at, namely, "to find some effective agency for cherishing the ideal within you." The suggestion is John Morley's. "Multiply," he says, "the half-hour by 365, and consider what treasures you might have laid by at the end of the year; and what happiness, fortitude, and wisdom they would have given you during all the days of your life." You will do this not to become versed in literature as the scholar is versed, for literature is less than life; but you will do it to become a full man, with an ample mind, and a heart disciplined through association with noble examples of justice and virtue and self-restraint. To cut out this half-hour

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

from each day's life, for this purpose, can surely be no great sacrifice to you. You will hardly miss it, after a time; and, indeed, you will soon come to give it with a feeling of eager delight. Nay, it is as much your duty to do this as it is to provide for your family. Otherwise you will starve the soul and, in starving it of this spiritual food, you will prevent its growth, stunt its fine impulses, and deny to it the enjoyment and cultivation of excellent companionship and dignified intercourse.

Now it does not at all follow, as I have already hinted, that all books are worth reading. Indeed, of the many that have been made since printing was invented, but a very few, comparatively, are really necessary; are, truly, even desirable. What is necessary and desirable is the habit of reading with reflection and un-

## READING

derstanding. The habit, once acquired and cultivated at whatever cost of time, a power of discrimination will come to you which will enable you to distinguish and select the good from the bad, what for you is right from what for you is wrong. Mark Pattison, a great scholar and a voracious reader, said that no man who respected himself could have less than one thousand volumes in his library. But Pattison spoke as the student with ample time at his disposal. We, under the stress of our latter-day business life, dare not so overburden this duty we have laid on ourselves. We shall respect ourselves with a less number if those we have are the right ones, and if we have read them to our advantage. "Reading for mere reading's sake," says Mr. Frederic Harrison in that eloquent and wise guide, *The Choice of Books*, "instead of for the

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

sake of the good we gain from reading, is one of the worst and commonest and most unwholesome habits we have." This abuse of reading, to which I have before referred, has bred in us an indifference, I might say a contempt, for the books that are, in truth, "the precious life-blood of a master-spirit." We have come to look upon a "classic" as something wearying, dry, and too exacting. The very word, when applied to a book, repels us. This is due simply to our pernicious habit of reading for mere reading's sake. We give the classic no chance to prove himself what he really is, and what he may be for us.

The world of books is so crowded that we shall find it no easy matter to make friends in it unless we have acquired the power of selection. Failing this power we must accept the judgment of the

## *READING*

world of men. This has long ago decided which are the masters we may count ourselves privileged to know. That judgment is there to help us in our choice. Homer and Æschylus and Shakespeare; Dante and Milton; Goethe and Molière, will remain great among the best writers so long as men shall have minds and hearts to frame and cherish ideals. In this world of books, as in the world of life, you will find there are not so very many real friends after all. You may consider yourself fortunate if you find a hundred or even fifty. Having found them, "grapple them to your soul with hooks of steel." If you are worthy of their friendship; if you are courteous and grateful for their courtesy and lovingkindness, they will keep nothing from you. They will capture you with their enchanter eyes and lead you to pleasant



## *THE PLEASURE OF*

places. In their company you will travel richly and live in rich experiences. Shakespeare's revealing magic will make you know real men and women as you could never have known them of your own knowledge. Homer will chant to you of the deeds of his heroes. Icelandic poets will troll the Sagas of their Vikings. Historians will unroll the scrolls of time and blazon on them the many-coloured robes of the people of the world as they pass from the darkness across the light into the darkness again. All these things shall be done for you alone; not in a public place, but in the quiet seclusion of your study or the hidden nook of your summer garden. Here is enough possibility of experience to last you your lifetime. Do not be over-eager to make too many acquaintances at one time. The gods were ever jealous of

## *READING*

each other. Therefore go to each as your spirit moves you, and leave him the moment you feel you have touched hands. In that moment there will have been imparted to you some of the author's spirit which you will do well to keep as your own. It is the touch that shall make you kin with all the rest. The hour you set aside for the reading of one of these books should be a sacred hour; for the spirit of the writer is the spirit of the place for the time being, and the ground you stand on is therefore made holy. But be of good courage, of good cheer, of a clean mind and a tempered spirit, and the great one shall find it pleasant to remain with you and, mayhap, abide with you always. So shall you, yourself, become a good friend, a true lover, a fine father, and an excellent good fellow.

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

“A book, like a person,” said Walter Pater, “has its fortunes with one; is lucky or unlucky, in the precise moment of its falling in our way, and often by some happy accident counts with us for something more than its independent value.” That is the moment to which I have just referred. It will be often wise to put off the reading of a book; perhaps only to glance idly at its pages to see if your mood is just then the book’s mood, or if your mood finds its proper air in the book. If you are not held, let it go; the right time has not yet come; but it certainly will. “Some happy accident,” mayhap, will send you to it, or it to you, and then it will become the wonder-working thing which you had sought for your life long. A new world will then open before you at the touch of this magician’s wand. Like the apple

## *READING*

that dropped into Newton's lap, it may send you exploring mysteries and lead you to a new revelation; or it may inspire you to some great deed, or bring you back loving to the dear one you parted from in anger.

To be fortunate in such a happy accident, the books must be at hand where you can see them at all times of your leisure. Let them be about you, even if you do not touch them for years. They can wait, if you can. But let them be there; for you never know when the voice in the temple of your mind will call you. And let them be there also for the sake of their presence. Their silent breathing will perfume the air of your home and make it a place pleasant to live in. Their silent companionship will appeal to the better part of you, and you will hesitate in your follies; you must be

***THE PLEASURE OF READING***

**a gentleman to live with gentlemen.  
“Come, my best friends, my books,”  
you will say with Cowley, “and lead me  
on.”**

II

**THE PLEASURE OF  
READING THE BIBLE**



THE PLEASURE OF READING  
THE BIBLE



THE Bible is not one book; it is a library of books; a literature in itself. It is the ancient literature of the people of Israel, embodying the best exercise of the creative imagination in poetry, romance, history, oratory and prophecy, of the people who believed themselves to be the chosen people of God. It is also the ethical code of both Jews and Christians, and the source of rabbinical exposition and Church Theology. In dealing with this book, however, as a means for giving pleasure, I must disregard its authoritative value for religion or theology. The religious emotion is not primarily pleasurable;



## *THE PLEASURE OF*

nor is theology literature. The purpose of religion is directive to conduct; it is based on the existence of a definite relation between the individual and an accepted objective ideal. Pleasure is directive to nothing; it is the emotion experienced from a freedom from any relation, when the individual is most himself. The two, therefore, are antithetical. This is not, however, to say that the religious man cannot experience pleasure, or that the man of pleasure may not be deeply religious. Each can be the other; but, in being each, he is not, for the time being, the other. The Sermon on the Mount can be read for the purpose of fortifying a faith in Christ; but it can also be read for the sake of the beauty of its literary form, its noble language, its suggestive influence on the mind for cherishing an inspiring ideal.

## ***READING THE BIBLE***

The pleasure from this is the purest and most satisfying of all pleasures, because it affirms and fulfils the self.

When I speak of the Bible I mean the English translation of the Hebrew Scriptures and the Greek Testament. The translators of these writings tapped the purest springs of the English language. Whether or no they rendered the exact meanings of the original words of the Hebrew and Greek texts is, in this connection, of small matter. As it has been given us, in the Authorised and Revised Versions, the Bible is the noblest monument of English we possess; a book of magnificent language embodying the aspirations of men and women for an ideal to be cherished as an abiding influence on life.

It is the reading of this book for the sake of the pleasure to be derived from

## THE PLEASURE OF

*generative powers of the world are healthsome,  
and there is no poison of destruction in them  
. . . for righteousness is immortal."*

*"Blessed are they that hunger and thirst  
after righteousness: for they shall be filled.  
. . . Blessed are the pure in heart: for they  
shall see God."*

The compelling power precipitated from words rightly placed is enough in itself to make converts. The mind is lifted by the beauty of the language and placed on the high road to faith: the pleasure has paved the way. To men and women, "looking before and after and pining for what is not," such words as I have quoted must have come like the sound of refreshing waters to the thirsty traveller. They carried a music in them that charmed quite apart from the comforting message they bore. The people marched to the music, they fought to

## *READING THE BIBLE*

the sound of it, and they died with it ringing joyously in their ears, the while their souls were dancing to it. Unhappily, to later generations, the freshness of the music wore off; the message alone was heard, and heard without the music, robbed of its virgin vivifying beauty. Teachers then became fanatics; soldiers dogmatics; and the people spiritually barren. Science and trade, with their siren voices, led to the worship of false gods where beauty is not; men fought for wealth and killed each other for a creed. - Beauty fled, a hunted thing, to dwell in lonely places, and now the music of the Bible is rarely heard at all. Even where, in some quiet spot, a sincere shepherd may be found piping to his flock, his voice is perhaps uncouth, and his fingers have not been taught the cunning of their use. What we too often hear are

## THE PLEASURE OF

brazen-mouthed teachers blatantly repeating the words; but the noise that comes from them is that of sounding brass, as if they were counting the coins of their wage—the harp and the psaltery are no more. Yet can I well imagine a Salvini in the pulpit speaking the words of the Bible in such fashion as to put a tongue in every sense and set the hearts of his hearers again dancing to the organ music:

*“Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain; and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed.”*

*“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters.”*

*“Sing, O heavens:  
And be joyful, O earth;  
And break forth into singing, O mountains;  
For the Lord hath comforted his people,  
And will have compassion upon his afflicted.”*

## ***READING THE BIBLE***

Why are not ministers of religion more generally taught the art of reading this Bible aloud, that its language might be listened to and its music be made known in all its many tones of exquisite sound? It is an education devoutly to be wished for.

Biblical criticism and modern science may have settled this or that fact. The story of the creation as we read it in Genesis may or may not appeal to the sophisticated reason of the day; but the reader of this story, if he is to know its real pleasure-giving power, must deal with it in quite a different fashion from that of the critic. It will be sufficient for him that the writer of the story believed it; and by the writer I mean the translators just as much as I do the author of the Hebrew original; for only because of the influence of such a belief can I ac-

## THE PLEASURE OF

count for the excellence of the later expression. It is the excellence born of sincerity, a sincerity that is stamped everywhere in the Bible, and that makes its language so arresting and so appealing.

*“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be Light: and there was Light. And God saw the Light that it was good: and God divided the Light from the Darkness. And God called the Light Day; and the Darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning was the first day.”*

The arresting impressiveness lies in the telling simplicity of the language that holds the poet's imaginative thought amply and completely: not a drop is spilt. Out of this telling simplicity comes a fulfilling music of words in-

## READING THE BIBLE

evitably placed that soothes the ear:  
“ And darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” The words with their music send us feeling with Wordsworth—

*“ A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling<sup>o</sup> is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:  
A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things.”*

With what a fine reiteration does this same sense steal over us in reading of God's covenant with Noah! How nobly simple is the language of the poet's child-like naïveté of intimacy, expressing his own soul's relation with nature and nature's God!



## THE PLEASURE OF

*“ And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh: And the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud: and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant.”*

God was very real to this writer, as real to him as the spirit that “ rolls through all things ” was to Wordsworth. The personification is the poet’s way of making his thought visual so that his readers might be, with him, in the same living relation to it. The rainbow in the cloud, coming as it did with the cheering light of the smiling sun, spoke to him of divine clemency after storm; filled him

## **READING THE BIBLE**

with the benignancy of the quiet, cool atmosphere after summer's heavy showers, and coloured an imagination tranquilised after the fear from the raging elements. It became the symbol of a covenant between God and man, of security and life.

In the art of story-telling the writer of the human tale of Joseph and his brethren has very rarely been surpassed. The narrative opens simply and moves along gently, reaching its climax of emotion by the very force of the situation brought about. It is nowhere strained, nowhere marred by attempts at the grandiose or pathetic. It is a delightful example of the power of sincerity in the telling of a tale. Who can read unmoved Joseph's final words, when he reveals himself to his brothers? "I am Joseph: doth my father yet live?" But

## THE PLEASURE OF

it is all so simple, so direct and so finely inevitable in its simplicity and directness.

The splendid imagery of Jacob's farewell words to his sons is another instance of the wonder-working literary art of the Biblical writers. It is an appeal, a benediction, a touching of spirits to fine issues, a father's prophetic insight into his children's characters, and all couched in noble words nobly ordered. It reads like an ode addressed to the founders of a new nation:

*“ Reuben, thou art my first-born,  
My might, and the beginning of my strength;  
The excellency of dignity, and the excellency  
of power.  
Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.*

. . .

*“ Simeon and Levi are brethren;  
Weapons of violence are their swords.  
O my soul, come not thou into their council;  
Unto their assembly, my glory, be not thou  
united;*

## READING THE BIBLE

*For in their anger they slew men,  
And in their self-will houghed oxen.  
Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce;  
And their wrath, for it was cruel:  
I will divide them in Jacob,  
And scatter them in Israel.*

*“Judah, thee shall thy brethren praise:  
Thy hand shall be on the neck of thine ene-  
mies;  
Thy father’s sons shall bow down before thee.  
Judah is a lion’s whelp;  
From the prey, my son, thou art gone up:  
He stooped down, he couched as a lion,  
And as a lioness; who shall rouse him up?  
The sceptre shall not depart from Judah,  
Nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet,  
Till he come to Shiloh,  
Having obedience of the peoples.  
Binding his foot unto the vine,  
And his ass’s colt unto the choice vine;  
He hath washed his garments in wine,  
And his vesture in the blood of grapes:  
His eyes shall be red with wine,  
And his teeth white with milk.”*

From such a stock were born the tribes  
who founded a new nation and ordered a

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

new commandment. Is it any wonder that they did great deeds and saw visions? Who shall dare hope to win against men who walk with God, and see their ideals in all living things, and who make the ideal appear in the work of their hands? This was the spirit with which Palestine was nationalized; it was the spirit in which the great mission bearers conquered. It is the spirit in which alone abiding work can be accomplished. It is the power that lies in all noble expressions, and gives meaning and value to all literature. Poets have made more heroes in the flesh than they have pictured in their language. That is what they are for—through noble language to attune hearts and inspire minds to doing nobly and being noble. Otherwise literature has no place in life. I go back in thought and find the solution of

## READING THE BIBLE

England's greatness in the past and America's foundation in the present to the moving influence of this English Bible on our Puritan forefathers. It was a trumpet-blast calling on them as the hosts of the Lord to fight the battles of the Lord; it was a revelation of man's equality in the sight of the Lord; it was a realization of a living ideal by which men might come to live in peace and joy together; and it was also a glorious message of hope.

*“The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.”*

The light that shined on the people of England in King James's and King Charles's days came from this Bible. Life, because of it, took on new and lovely colours, and men braced them-

## THE PLEASURE OF

selves to live it anew. What they had once dared as barons they now dared as yeomen; and the fathers who dared King Charles bred sons who dared King George. Thus does literature justify itself.

What must have been in the hearts of the children of Israel as they listened to Moses' song, on the eve of his death, when in sight of the Promised Land?

*“ Give ear, ye heavens, and I will speak;  
And let the earth hear the words of my mouth:  
My doctrine shall drop as the rain,  
My speech shall distil as the dew;  
As the small rain upon the tender grass,  
And as the showers upon the herb:  
For I will proclaim the name of the Lord.*

*“ For all his ways are judgement:  
A God of faithfulness and without iniquity,  
Just and right is He.”*

Do these same children of Israel hear

## *READING THE BIBLE*

these words now? Does their music make glad their spirits? Surely, if words mean anything, these words mean the same to-day that they meant thousands of years ago! God is still a God of faithfulness, if we remain true to our ideal. He is still without iniquity, if we keep our own natures clean. He remains just and right, so long as we live justly and rightly, each to the other. But we have missed the pleasure of reading this Bible, and no longer hear its inspiring music. I must believe that we have misunderstood this wonderful book; that we have allowed ourselves to be led astray and so lost the sense for pure enjoyment. If we have read the letter we have been altogether blind to the spirit—the spirit of Beauty, which is in the Bible as it is in the *Iliad*, as it is in the *Divine Comedy*, as it is in Shakespeare, in Milton, in



## *THE PLEASURE OF*

Keats, in Wordsworth, and in all great manifestations of literary art.

The conforming Jew reads the Psalms every Sabbath day, until he has learned them by rote. They appear in his daily prayers and reappear in the devotional exercises on festival and fast days. He can chant them by number, and recite them at command. Has he accomplished more than a feat of the memory? Has the poet's music stirred his soul to finer impulses through purer pleasure? Let his life answer the questions. But the same questions may be asked of the Christian also. The truth is we have spoiled our taste for this splendid literature by making its reading a task instead of a life-giving delight. When the child at school is compelled to learn by rote Wordsworth's *Lucy Gray*, or Shelley's *Ode to a Skylark*, or Keats's *Ode*

## READING THE BIBLE

to a *Nightingale*, or a hundred lines from Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*, the child cannot possibly see the revealing beauty in these poems. Its mind is centered on quite a different object, the object of accomplishing an ordered exercise. For the child to see beauty it must come on beauty, so to speak. Beauty must startle it into an awareness of something strange in its experience. Then will the child's curious soul be drawn to the revelation, and it will nevermore forget the meeting. In exactly the same way all great literature must be approached—gently led to delightful surprises. If the mood be not upon us it is wiser to leave the reading alone. "Soft stillness and the night become the touches of sweet harmony." Let the right atmosphere be made and the right mood realized before you listen to the poet's

## THE PLEASURE OF

songs. Then will such a psalm as the nineteenth lift your spirit on self-born wings:

*“ The heavens declare the glory of God;  
And the firmament showeth his handiwork.  
Day unto day uttereth speech,  
And night unto night showeth knowledge.  
There is no speech nor language;  
Their voice is not heard.*

*“ Their line is gone out through all the earth,  
And their words to the end of the world.  
In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun,  
Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his  
chamber,  
And rejoiceth as a strong man to run his  
course.  
His going forth is from the end of the  
heavens,  
And his circuit unto the ends of it;  
And there is nothing hid from the heat  
thereof.*

*“ The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the  
soul;  
The testimony of the Lord is sure, making  
wise the simple.*

## READING THE BIBLE

*The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing  
the heart:*

*The commandment of the Lord is pure, en-  
lightening the eyes:*

*The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for-  
ever:*

*The ordinances of the Lord are true, and  
righteous altogether.*

*“More to be desired are they than gold, yea,  
than much fine gold;  
Sweeter also than honey and the droppings of  
the honeycomb.”*

Or this exquisite confession of God's  
protective influence, as embodied in the  
twenty-third Psalm:

*“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.  
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;  
He leadeth me beside the still waters.  
He restoreth my soul:  
He guideth me in the paths of righteousness  
for his name's sake.*

*“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the  
shadow of death,*

## THE PLEASURE OF

*I will fear no evil; for thou art with me;  
Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.*

*“Thou preparest a table before me in the pres-  
ence of mine enemies;  
Thou hast anointed my head with oil;  
My cup runneth over.  
Surely goodness and loving-kindness shall  
follow me all the days of my life;  
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord  
for ever.”*

The poetry of devotion must be gently dealt with, otherwise we are in danger of adulterating its fine aroma. The poet's mood must be our mood, or we shall altogether miss the music. The hour that fits Burns's *The Jolly Beggars* is not the hour for Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, and the mood meet for the story of Samson and Delilah shuns the Sermon on the Mount. The Bible must be treated fairly, as we would any other work of accepted literature. One need not read at all if the ear be not inclined.

## READING THE BIBLE

If the singing of songs is the natural demand, then sing songs. We are no longer children to do this or that at a bidding. It were well that children were also dealt with in a proper fashion.— It is unseemly to force or be forced, and unjust to your author. When we shall have learned to be less familiar and more courteous to the Bible we shall not only value it with livelier discrimination, but the book itself will yield to us, more and more benignantly, the fine enjoyment of its beauty.

Rich as the Bible is in poetry of devotion, it is as rich in lyrical poetry. The Book of Psalms is full of lyrics, and the Song of Solomon is an entire series of love lyrics. These latter are exquisitely beautiful:

*“ I am a rose of Sharon,  
A lily of the valleys.*

## THE PLEASURE OF

*“ As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood,  
So is my beloved among the sons.  
I sat down under the shadow with great de-  
light,  
And his fruit was sweet to my taste.  
He brought me to the banqueting house,  
And his banner over me was love.*

*“ Stay ye me with raisins, refresh me with  
apples;  
For I am sick from love.  
Let his left hand be under my head,  
And his right hand embrace me.*

. . .

*“ The voice of my beloved! behold, he cometh,  
Leaping upon the mountains,  
Skipping upon the hills.  
My beloved is like a roe or a young hart:  
Behold, he standeth behind our wall;  
He looketh in at the windows;  
He glanceth through the lattice.  
My beloved spake and said unto me,  
Arise up, my love, my fair one, and come  
away.*

*“ For, lo, the winter is past;  
The rain is over and gone;*

## READING THE BIBLE

*The flowers appear on the earth;  
The time of the singing of birds is come,  
And the voice of the turtle is heard in our  
land;*

*The fig-tree ripeneth her green figs,  
And the vines are in blossom;  
They give forth their fragrance.  
Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away."*

These songs of love between a husband and wife must be read in their complete sequence to enjoy their pulsating melody. Whatever secondary interpretation the criticism of theologians may offer by way of explanation, the poems must continue to appeal because of the response they find in every true lover's heart. "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it."

The writers of the Bible possessed a gift which few modern writers possess; they had the power to express the philosophy of life as literature. The Book



## *THE PLEASURE OF*

of Job is a masterly dramatic allegory, the language of which rises to the highest form of poetical expression. The Proverbs of Solomon may be arranged, as Professor Moulton has arranged them, so that they form sonnets. He has also divided the Book of Ecclesiastes into essays, epigrams, sonnets, and "wisdom clusters." But the Book of Job stands supreme, among its kind, in all literature. We shall best accept it as the poetic tragedy of a noble mind struggling to find a reasonable basis for faith in God's divine judgments and finding peace at last in a realization that faith is better than knowledge and is the profoundest wisdom the human soul can attain.

Job had been a wealthy man. He feared God and walked in the ways of righteousness. Suddenly, in one single day, ruin came upon him. He lost his

## ***READING THE BIBLE***

flocks, his camels, his home and his family. He barely had time to realize the calamities that had befallen him when he himself was afflicted by a loathsome disease. He became an outcast and a dweller with the dogs on the village ash-mound. As he lived there wondering why God had thus punished him, his friends came to argue with him by way of explaining the reason for his afflictions. Each, according to his point of view, tells him that sin is the cause of all misfortune in life, and that he must have sinned grievously to be thus visited by God's anger. Job cannot understand this. He never believed he was a perfect man; but if God is all-powerful, why does he not pardon his sin, so that he may pass into "the land of darkness and of the shadow of death" with some little of comfort to himself? One of

## THE PLEASURE OF

his friends thereupon asks him: "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" And he advises him to be good and of faith in God:

*"If thou set thine heart aright,  
And stretch out thine hands toward Him;  
If iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away,  
And let no unrighteousness dwell in thy tents;  
Surely then shalt thou lift up thy face without spot;  
Yea, thou shalt be steadfast, and shalt not fear."*

Job answers: "No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you. But I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you . . . The tents of the robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure. Why does God permit these things? Why should evil succeed and good be punished?" He

## **READING THE BIBLE**

tries to find the meaning in this seeming paradox, and is driven along two lines of thought. — Either God's world is void of meaning, a world in which evil must triumph; or it may be that all things will be righted in a world to come, in a future life. — Either way, however, does not comfort Job, because he is consumed by a passionate desire to vindicate himself now, while he is yet in the flesh, before the people he knew in the days of his prosperity who have falsely interpreted the cause of his degradation. — In a series of remarkably dramatic speeches the argument is taken up by each of the actors in turn, until God Himself, as a Voice out of the whirlwind, interrupts the speakers and, in a poem of magnificent grandeur, humbles Job to the very dust. Then does Job realize that true wisdom is not to be found in knowledge but in faith. When

## ***THE PLEASURE OF***

he has realized this in its fulness he is able to say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him." But he comes to this wisdom only after he has been shown that the mystery of evil is but the least of the mysteries of the universe. The Divine argument is so wonderfully embodied that Job is overwhelmed, and can but brokenly cry: "I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of thine can be restrained . . . Therefore have I uttered that which I understood not, things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak . . . I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee: wherefore, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

Here is a portion of the Divine Argument by which God revealed Himself to Job and brought him to a sense of the

## READING THE BIBLE

profound and purifying humility of ignorance that leads him to faith:

*“ Where wast thou when I laid the foundations  
of the earth?*

*Declare, if thou hast understanding,  
Who determined the measures thereof, if thou  
knowest?*

*Or who stretched the line upon it?  
Whereupon were the foundations thereof  
fastened?*

*Or who laid the cornerstone thereof,  
When the morning stars sang together,  
And all the sons of God shouted for joy?*

*“ Or who shut up the sea with doors,  
When it brake forth, as if newly born;  
When I made clouds the garment thereof,  
And thick darkness a swaddling-band for it,  
And marked out for it my bound,  
And set bars and doors,  
And said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no  
further;  
And here shall thy proud waves be stayed?*

*“ Hast thou commanded the morning since thy  
days began,  
And caused the dayspring to know its place?*

## **THE PLEASURE OF**

*Hast thou entered into the springs of the sea?  
Or hast thou walked in the recesses of the  
deep?*

*Have the portals of the grave been revealed  
unto thee?*

*Or hast thou seen the gates of the shadow of  
death?*

*Hast thou comprehended the earth in its  
breadth?*

*Declare, if thou knowest it all!*

*“Where is the way to the dwelling place of  
light?*

*And as for darkness, where is the place  
thereof,*

*That thou shouldst take it to the bound  
thereof,*

*And that thou shouldst discern the paths to  
the house thereof?*

*Doubtless thou knowest, for thou wast then  
born,*

*And the number of thy days is great!*

*“Canst thou bind the cluster of the Pleiades,  
Or loose the bands of Orion?*

*Canst thou lead forth the signs of the Zodiac  
in their season?*

*Or canst thou guide the Bear with her train?*

## READING THE BIBLE

*Knowest thou the ordinances of the heavens?  
Canst thou establish the dominion thereof in  
the earth? "*

Well, indeed, may Job have exclaimed: "What shall I answer thee? I lay mine hand upon my mouth." — The argument is a sublime poem of a mighty execution. The creative genius of this poet has here never been surpassed. He may worthily take his place by the side of Homer, Dante and Milton. But the whole book is, indeed, one of the marvels of literature.

In *Ecclesiasticus*, one of the so-called Apocryphal books of the Bible, there is a little essay on Friendship which deserves re-setting, even though the subject has been dealt with by many writers since, from Bacon downwards. —

"Sweet words," says this counsellor, "will multiply a man's friends; and a



## *THE PLEASURE OF*

fair-speaking tongue will multiply courtesies. Let those that are at peace with thee be many; but thy counsellors one of a thousand. If thou wouldest get thee a friend, get him by proving, and be not in haste to trust him. For there is a friend that is so for his own occasion, and he will not continue in the day of thy affliction. And there is a friend that turneth to enmity; and he will discover strife to thy reproach. And there is a friend that is a companion at the table, and he will not continue in the day of thy affliction; and in thy prosperity he will be as thyself, and will be bold over thy servants; if thou shalt be brought low, he will be against thee, and he will hide himself from thy face. Separate thyself from thine enemies; and beware of thy friends. A faithful friend is a strong defence; and he that hath found him

## READING THE BIBLE

hath found a treasure. There is nothing that can be taken in exchange for a faithful friend; and his excellency is beyond price. A faithful friend is a medicine of life; and they that fear the Lord shall find him. He that feareth the Lord directeth his friendship aright; for as he is, so is his neighbour also."

From *Ecclesiastes* I take the liberty to quote, in Professor Moulton's setting, a portion of the twelfth chapter, which he entitles, "The Coming of Evil Days":—

*"Remember also thy Creator in the days of  
thy youth!  
Or ever the evil days come,  
And the years draw nigh,  
When thou shalt say, I have no pleas-  
ure in them:*

*"Or ever the sun,  
And the light,  
And the moon,*

## **THE PLEASURE OF**

*And the stars,  
Be darkened,  
And the clouds return after the rain:*

*“ In the days when the keepers of the house  
shall tremble,  
And the strong men shall bow themselves,  
And the grinders cease because they are few,  
And those that look out of the windows be  
darkened,  
And the door shall be shut in the street;*

*“ When the sound of the grinding is low,  
And one shall rise up at the voice of a bird;  
And all the daughters of music shall be  
brought low;*

*“ Yea, they shall be afraid of that which is  
high,  
And terrors shall be in the way;*

*“ And the almond tree shall blossom,  
And the grasshopper shall be a burden,  
And the caperberry shall burst:*

*“ Because man goeth to his long home,  
And the mourners go about the streets:*

## READING THE BIBLE

*“ Or ever the silver cord be loosed,  
Or the golden bowl be broken,  
Or the pitcher be broken at the fountain,  
Or the wheel broken at the cistern:*

*“ And the dust return to the earth,  
As it was;  
And the spirit return unto God  
Who gave it.”* >

The Preacher prefixes this beautifully sombre poem with a short exhortation written in prose as beautiful, and revealing his kindly and sweet sympathy for the frailty of human nature and the evanescence of human life:

*“ Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun. Yea, if a man live many years, let him rejoice in them all; and remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity. Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know then, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgement. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and*

## ***THE PLEASURE OF***

*put away evil from thy flesh: for youth and the prime of life are vanity."*

But this tone is not the prevailing tone of the Bible, which is one of splendid optimism. Only serve the Lord and it shall be well with you—that is the keynote of the Hebrew Scriptures; it is also its practical value for life. Even Isaiah rejoices in this truth:

*"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him  
That bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace,  
That bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation:  
That saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth."*

That is the secret revealed. Everything is beautiful, everything is right, everything is good, because God reigneth. From this fountain did Browning drink

## ***READING THE BIBLE***

**his joyous faith: "God's in His heaven.  
All's right with the world."**

**The lasting appeal in the New Testament is made as the Gospel of Love. That is the revelation it brought to mankind; and it has been embodied largely, not in poetry, but in prose. The prose, however, is of so excellent a quality that its words have passed into our current speech; so that if we use them even carelessly they have yet an arresting power to make us pause and give us thought. The Sermon on the Mount and the thirteenth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians are together the finest flowers of speech containing this gospel. The sermon, however, is expressed in the language as of one in authority; the epistle is argumentative and persuasive. Christ spoke to eager listeners; Paul wrote to cultured thinkers. Yet when Paul comes**

## THE PLEASURE OF

to the subject of love he rises to finely moving eloquence:

*“If I speak with the tongue of men and angels,” he says, “but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing. Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall be done away; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall be done away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part: but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child I spoke as a child,*

## READING THE BIBLE

*I felt as a child, I thought as a child: now that I am become a man, I have put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then I shall know even also as I have been known. But now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love."*

It is not possible to read this language senseless to the power of words. The magical art of the writer is almost a piece of wizardry. He rings the changes on the word, turning it this way and that way, until the mind of the reader has exhausted its own experiences in following the writer's argument. And after the kaleidoscope has been turned in every direction, the final appeal is made to the personal emotion; but so deftly made that the reader is not conscious of having been led to a conviction, but believes he has brought himself to it. "And yet the con-



## ***THE PLEASURE OF***

viction would be worth little were there no response in the reader's heart to the truth; were there no possibility of the relation between him and the ideal presented to him. It is because of this possibility that Paul's epistle will be read so long as men shall walk the earth. It belongs, with the rest of the Bible, to that body of work of the creative imagination which in song, oration, romance and story, has attempted to spell the experiences of life in the language of beauty, and given to striving and traving men and women a joyous hope in each to-morrow in the happiness of each to-day. For literature is less than life; it is not our master, but our servant. The gods well know how profoundly and pathetically we still need the help.

I have tried, in as few words as I could express it, to show that the Bible, taking

## **READING THE BIBLE**

it as literature only, may be read for the pleasure it affords. I have tried to emphasize fruitfully the purity of that pleasure, leading as it does, to the cultivation of our sense of beauty in language and thought; and to an awareness of beauty in all things. I have done this, in the first place, because I believe there is no one book, in all the literatures of the world, that so amply and so bravely searches all that can affect our minds and hearts. It is a panorama of life in action, of the struggle of man against nature and himself and of his reconciliation with nature and himself; it is a pageant of the progress of peoples to the making of nations; it is a body of poetry and prose singing of the joy of living for life's sake, and the joy of loving for all sakes. It is, finally, the record in imperishable speech of the dis-

## **THE PLEASURE OF**

covery of how man redeemed himself by achieving an ideal.

In the second place, it has seemed to me proper to do this, in order that I might help to reinstate the Bible in its rightful place. It has too long been allowed to rest, in lordly isolation, to be guarded by augurs from the common touch, as if it required interpreters to explain its hidden secrets. The Bible will never be known after this fashion. There are no secrets in it that any true heart cannot know. There is nothing to explain. It is a book to take by the hand; to turn to in hours of joy; to look to in times of sorrow; and to accept at all times as the sincere efforts of men and women like ourselves toward perfection. Above all, it is a book to be happy with.

*“ Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I*

## READING THE BIBLE

*will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And he that heareth, let him say, Come. And he that is athirst, let him come: and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."*



**III**

**THE PLEASURE OF  
READING POETRY.**



## THE PLEASURE OF READING POETRY



**T** has always seemed to me strange that poetry should require an introduction to its enjoyment; that any "defence" or "apology" should be made for it; or that any guide should be necessary to its "knowledge." Poetry is not an object for knowledge; it is really a personal experience, a necessary condition of the soul toward growth that comes to us at certain moments without any conscious effort on our part, but that may be aroused in us by reading a poem. How or why this is so is a mystery. The fact, however, remains that the appeal poetry makes is universal, immediate, and does



## THE PLEASURE OF

not depend for appreciation on information to be obtained from instructors or guides.

A poem *is* when, in reading it, we are *en rapport* with it. If there arise no response in us to what it is, then for us, it is not. Yet, like the

*“barrèd clouds that bloom the dying day,”*  
it is still there. It is we who are, for the moment, either blind or without the sense to experience it. I must then believe, since, as a matter of fact, the guide is found to be necessary, that his business is not so much to point out what particular poetry gives most pleasure, as what in us requires cultivation in order to experience the pleasure to be obtained from any poem.

Now this is not very easy to do; nor would it be very exciting to read when done. Were I even competent for the

## *READING POETRY*

task the result, I am afraid, might not accomplish the purpose I have in mind. The reader would be wearied in an intricacy of psychological analyses which would not greatly enlighten him, nor would it much help him to the enjoyment of poetry.

It is possible, of course, by enquiring into the nature of poetry, into its so-called meaning and value, to build up, so to speak, that condition of the mind which is favourable to poetic experience. In this way, we might come to discover hidden virtues in ourselves and, therefore, hidden beauties in the poems; and, perhaps, find that our blindness and lack of sense were only seeming or momentary, and that poetry is itself a revealing and sensing power. But along this road also we may meet Professor Dryasdust, and he is not a very interesting compan-

## THE PLEASURE OF

ion, if we are intending to travel with those who say of themselves:

- “ We are the music makers,  
And we are the dreamers of dreams,  
Wandering by lone sea-breakers,  
And sitting by desolate streams;—  
World-lovers and world-forsakers,  
On whom the pale moon gleams:  
Yet we are the movers and shakers  
Of the world for ever, it seems.*
- “ With wonderful deathless ditties  
We build up the world’s great cities,  
And out of the fabulous story  
We fashion an empire’s glory:  
One man, with a dream, at pleasure,  
Shall go forth and conquer a crown:  
And three with a new song’s measure  
Can trample a kingdom down.*
- “ We, in the ages lying  
In the buried past of the earth,  
Built Nineveh with our sighing,  
And Babel itself in our mirth;  
And o’erthrew them with prophesying  
To the old of the new world’s worth;  
For each age is a dream that is dying,  
Or one that is coming to birth.”*

## READING POETRY

These are daring, reckless fellows who are apt. to fling friend Dryasdust into the nearest wayside ditch; and we ourselves might catch their infectious spirits and do things that are not seemly on the highroad of a law-abiding land.

Perhaps we shall do as well if we set no definite course, but let the subject itself take us where it will. If the highroad call us, let us take to it, but let us not feel obliged to keep to it if we find ourselves drawn to the by-lanes and grassy foot-paths that lead nowhere in particular, and may perhaps leave us listening to a brook, murmuring "under moon and stars in brambly wildernesses."

The pleasure of reading poetry may not be tapped at will. If it come not now, it may come then. The *habit* of reading poetry, however, may be so

## THE PLEASURE OF

gently encouraged and trained that the pleasure may be ours more and more frequently:

*“ Ever let the Fancy roam,  
Pleasure never is at home:  
At a touch sweet Pleasure melteth,  
Like to bubbles when rain pelteth.”*

The poet also, if he be worthy the name, has not sung “by precept only,” or “shed tears by rule.” He has quaffed “the live current.” He has grown to the power of his accomplished singing, even as the meadow-flower grew to the unfolding of its bloom—in freedom bold:

*“ And so the grandeur of the Forest-tree  
Comes not by casting in a formal mould,  
But from its own divine vitality.”*

This is Wordsworth’s poet, the man who is able to sing so that his songs shall be to us “a substantial world both

## *READING POETRY*

pure and good." If then we are to know the pleasure poetry affords we must search the literatures and find out who are the poets and what of their poetry best fulfils their high moods. This, perhaps, leads us to the purposes of this chapter, which are to name by name "the great music-makers," "the dreamers of dreams," "the world-lovers and world-forsakers," and to taste the purity and beauty of their work in its power to make pure our own impulses and to unfold our own sense for beauty. If poetry have a "meaning" and the poet a "value," both meaning and value are to be precipitated by our consideration of the man and his work.

Before naming these master-workers let us, for a moment, consider what the poet is, and how we may recognize his work as poetry. The poet has been nec-

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

essary at all times. Without him we should still be content, like the ox, to look only for the next mouthful of grass. Many of us, indeed, who have never experienced poetry, still spend our lives biting herbage and chewing the cud, though we call the food and the exercise by other names. Money and social position keep the eye blind and the ear deaf to what the poet is calling us. We have more need of the poet to-day than ever before, because of the greater need to-day than ever before for a living ideal that shall be the centre of our emotional activity.~ For the poet works in faithfulness to his ideal; he sets before us what is worshipful, what is desirable and worthy our aspirations, and what is hopeful and inspiring. These are what may be called his subject-matter. If he aim at anything it is to express an ex-

## READING POETRY

perience so that we, reading it, shall also live the experience even as he lived it. His success, in the appeal he makes to us, and his power in carrying us with him, are, together, the measure of the quality of his poetry. He also recalls us from the illusions of the world of *things* to the realities of the world of *thinks*. Good food, much money, high estate are good things to know and to have; but if our lives are mainly occupied with these, we are not living, says the poet; for we have thus severed our relation with that by which all things, good and less good, have fruitful and abiding values—the ideal within us. We must believe with Wordsworth that he

“ *Who looks*

*In steadiness, who hath among the least things  
An undersense of greatest; sees the parts  
As parts, but with a feeling of the whole ”*



## THE PLEASURE OF

lives and experiences what is worth the knowing.

The ideal within us is a phrase I permit myself to use for want of a better expression, merely to suggest what I mean. It is not a thing to comprehend; it is that which apprehends all things, so that these shall not be felt as separate and lifeless, but as unified, and alive because of the unification. It must, however, be a conscious reality to us if this universe of things is to mean anything for us, or if we are to experience joy.

*“ Our meddling intellects  
Mis-shape the beauteous forms of things—  
We murder to dissect.”*

This power that links all things, and us to all things, is the

*“ Spirit that knows no insulated spot,  
No chasm, no solitude, from link to link  
It circulates, the soul of all the worlds.”*

## *READING POETRY*

Wordsworth believed in this power as no poet before or since believed in it. Through its living wisdom he was able to reveal for us the mystery and the beauty that are in all the common things of life. By its saving grace he came to know the joy of a contemplative peace that almost passes understanding.

The poet also points out the futility of gaining the world and losing the soul. The gain is obtained at the sacrifice of the power to experience joy; for joy comes to us, not from the thing as thing, but from the relations the thing has to the infinite number of other things in play that we call life. From this point of view the poet is the interpreter of life. The interpretation, however, is not, as it is in philosophy or science, a formulation or a classification; it is a revelation; and the revelation is not to the mind's com-

## THE PLEASURE OF

prehension, but to the soul's apprehension.

Let me try to illustrate what I mean. Air in motion as wind is explained by science to be due to certain conditions brought about by the heat of the sun, and the earth's rotation on its axis. The physical fact of the wind blowing is a common experience at any season of the year. The thing is well known as thing. How did this physical fact affect the poet Shelley? He will tell us in his own magnificent language; in an ode which is, perhaps, the most passionately appealing lyric of the kind in English poetry—the *Ode to the West Wind*.

Shelley begins by addressing the West Wind as "Thou breath of Autumn's being," and tells how the leaves of the trees are being driven by it in all directions. He speaks of it as the charioteer

## READING POETRY

of "winged seeds" bearing them "to their dark wintry bed" to lie there until Spring shall bring Autumn's "azure sister" and fill plain and hill once more with living hues and odours. He calls on it as the "wild spirit," the "destroyer and preserver," to hear him. He begins again and pictures the wind as a stream on which are being shed loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves, "shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean." "On the blue surface of thine airy surge," he says, "are spread like the bright hair uplifted from the head of some fierce Mænad . . . the locks of the approaching storm." He calls again on the West Wind to hear him:

*"Thou dirge  
Of the dying year, to which this closing night  
Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre,  
Vaulted with all thy congregated might*

## THE PLEASURE OF.

*Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere  
Black rain, and fire, and hail will burst; O,  
hear!"*

Once again he calls on it, and this time  
the note of the appeal is calmer, though  
still intense:

*"Thou who didst waken from his summer  
dreams  
The blue Mediterranean, where he lay,  
Lulled by the coil of his crystalline streams,*

*Beside a pumice isle in Baiæ's bay,  
And show in sleep old palaces and towers  
Quivering within the wave's intenser day.*

*All overgrown with azure moss and flowers  
So sweet, the sense faints picturing them!*

*Thou  
For whose path the Atlantic's level powers*

*Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below  
The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which  
wear*

*The sapless foliage of the ocean, know*

## READING POETRY

*Thy voice, and suddenly grow grey with  
fear,  
And tremble and despoil themselves: O,  
hear!"*

This is his call. This is how the West Wind appealed to him. Now what is it he has to say to the West Wind? How does he appeal to it? How does he relate it to the ideal within him, and in relating it, make it one with the play of things called life? Thus:—

*"If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;  
If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;  
A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share*

*The impulse of thy strength, only less free  
Than thou, O, uncontroulable! If even  
I were as in my boyhood, and could be*

*The comrade of thy wanderings over heaven,  
As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed  
Scarce seemed a vision: I would ne'er have  
striven*

## THE PLEASURE OF

*As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.  
Oh! lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!  
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!*

*A heavy weight of hours has changed and  
bowed  
One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and  
proud.*

. . .

*Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:  
What if my leaves are falling like its own!  
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies*

*Will take from both a deep autumnal tone,  
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit  
fierce,  
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!*

*Drive my dead thoughts over the universe,  
Like wither'd leaves, to quicken a new birth;  
And by the incantation of this verse,*

*Scatter as from an unextinguished hearth  
Ashes and sparks, my words among man-  
kind!  
Be through my lips to unawakened earth*

*The trumpet of a prophecy! O wind,  
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind? "*

## *READING POETRY*

It is a sacrilege almost to break the sacred silence that must follow the reading of this magnificent prayer, this achingly moving communion with Nature. An approaching autumnal storm, near a wood by the Arno, had set Shelley's creative imagination weaving the web of this poem with the golden threads of his heart's emotions, and the colours of his magical fancy. Does this experience show any likeness to what we know, either through science or by our own senses, of the West Wind? Probably not. Our experiences of the West Wind are of the thing unrelated to the infinite number of other things we call life, untouched by the ideal within us. Shelley's experience of the West Wind is alive by virtue of his ideal, becomes an interpretation of life; but the interpretation is neither a formulation nor a

[99]

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## *THE PLEASURE OF*

classification; it is, indeed, a revelation.

This revelation, I have said, is one aspect of the poet's activity; that side of him with which he is himself concerned; the workings of his creative imagination in a conscious effort to embody them as poetry. The other side of him is in us; in the workings of our creative imagination, in the completeness with which we succeed in realizing the poem as our own personal experience. If the poem have any meaning or value it is here that these are made manifest; meaning and value are precipitated in the crucible of our consciousness. Art has no purpose other than this. It is in this sense that we speak of the poem as "living," when it becomes, to use a philosophical expression, "a permanent possibility of experience." We supplement the poem, and we are also the poet's complement.

## READING POETRY

We say then that the poet "builded better than he knew." We read into his work what he may never have thought; we derive from it many experiences that he had not. That is one of the mysteries in all great creative art. In its making something has slipped in between

*"The beauty coming and the beauty gone."*

This quality lies in the power of its infinite suggestiveness, which the best poetry has in common with all creation. We exercise ourselves in efforts to spell out its meanings. We would do far better were we simply to permit the aroma of the budding emotion, which the suggestion breathes in us, to spread its perfume in silence. It is, perhaps, because of this that poetry is the wonderful joy-giver it is. It enables us to see "the light that never was on sea or

## THE PLEASURE OF

land," and to catch the voices of mysterious echoes that reverberate in our hearts:

*"Such rebounds our inward ear  
Catches sometimes from afar—  
Listen, ponder, hold them dear;  
For of God—of God they are."*

It lingers with the beneficent sympathy of the inexpressible pathos that lies in such words:

*"But she is in her grave, and, oh,  
The difference to me."*

It fills Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale*, where the poet becomes one with the bird by forgetting his pain in the joy of being:

*"Thou wast not born for death, immortal  
Bird!  
No hungry generations tread thee down;  
The voice I hear this passing night was heard  
In ancient days of emperor and clown:*

## READING POETRY

*Perhaps the self-same song that found a  
path  
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when sick  
for home,  
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;  
The same that oft-times hath  
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the  
foam  
Of perilous seas, in faëry lands forlorn.*

*Forlorn! the very word is like a bell  
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!  
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well  
As she is famed to do, deceiving elf.  
Adieu! Adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades  
Past the near meadows, over the still  
stream,  
Up the hillside; and now 'tis buried deep  
In the next valley-glades:  
Was it a vision or a waking dream?  
Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep? ”*

It is the spirit that binds us to the hope in  
Shelley's passionate appeal to the West  
Wind:

“ O Wind,  
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind? ”

## THE PLEASURE OF

It is what Wordsworth felt, and said,  
and did not say, and wished to say, in  
*Tintern Abbey*:

*“ These beauteous forms,  
Through a long absence, have not been to me  
As is a landscape to a blind man’s eye:  
But oft, in lonely rooms, and ’mid the din  
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them  
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,  
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;  
And passing even into my purer mind,  
With tranquil restoration:—feelings too  
Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,  
As have no slight or trivial influence  
On that best portion of a good man’s life,  
His little, nameless, unremembered acts  
Of kindness and of love. Not less, I trust,  
To them I may have owed another gift,  
Of aspect more sublime; that blessèd mood,  
In which the burthen of the mystery,  
In which the heavy and the weary weight  
Of all this unintelligible world,  
Is lightened:—that serene and blessèd mood,  
In which the affections gently lead us on,—  
Until the breath of this corporeal frame  
And even the motion of our human blood*

## READING POETRY

*Almost suspended, we are laid asleep  
In body, and become a living soul:  
While with an eye made quiet by the power  
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,  
We see into the life of things.”* —

Shakespeare knew this shy spirit and caught her coming to him as he caught the south wind coming to him from a bank of violets. She is present in *Macbeth*, in *King Lear*, in *Hamlet*, in *Othello*, and in some of the lyrics scattered through his plays:

“ *Take, O take those lips away  
That so sweetly were forsworn,  
And those eyes, the break of day,  
Lights that do mislead the morn:  
But my kisses bring again,  
Bring again—  
Seals of love, but seal'd in vain,  
Seal'd in vain.*”

It is this spirit of suggestion, a creation in herself, which arises from a poem like the perfume from a meadow-flower,

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

and which the poet conjures up by the magic of his art, that is for us to catch and cherish. She is the poet's gift to us, as Light was God's gift. Born out of the chaotic vortex of the poet's creative imagination, she is yet a thing of beauty, and may be a joy forever. In the radiating light of her beauty is transfigured all that we see, and feel, and are, and hope to be. She is the gentle Spirit that ratifies and sanctifies for us the poet's act. It is to keep her alive that the poet is so much needed to-day.

But we must go out to meet her or she will not stay with us. She will not come where she is not invited, and where there is no place prepared for her. For this also the poet is needed—to prepare a place for her in our hearts by the music of his songs. She brings joy—both the pleasure and the pain of joy. We can-

## *READING POETRY*

not be joyous if we are busy with dead things, with the things that chain us to the mortar-wheel of life's round. These things, as I have already said, are good and desirable in their time and place; but they are not good and not desirable for all the time and in every place. If we accept them as a means to living and not as the end of living, they will serve us, and not we them. Let them then serve us to make some room, in our little space of years, for this bringer of joy, this vivifying spirit in poetry. And when she comes to us, let us not question her with our words. Joy is its own language, and speaks no other. If we will question, let us question her interpreter, the poet. What his answers will be, we may read in Homer, in Virgil, in Dante, in Chaucer, in Spenser, in Shakespeare, in Milton, in Goethe, in Burns, Byron,



## *THE PLEASURE OF*

Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Tennyson, Browning, and in the songs of all the singers who have walked with her and were most glad in serving her.

It is far from my purpose to enter on an analysis of the works of the poets. I shall have accomplished all I set out to do if I succeed in suggesting in a general way the kind of music they gave us. The reader must do the rest for himself. My purpose is only to awaken the desire and not to satisfy it. We are not all gifted alike; and what one may find in a song another may not, but may find something else; for the peculiar quality of the poet's work lies in the universality of its appeal, so that each of us may obtain pleasure in his own way.

We have seen what the poet's temper is. We have also seen what our temper should be in listening to him. If now we

## *READING POETRY*

turn to the poet Homer who sang in a language strange to our ears and lived in an age millenniums distant from ours, and ask what can this poet do for us; what special pleasure is he offering to humanity; what revelation has he made, we shall find ourselves transported into a world altogether different from that in which we live. Its atmosphere, its landscapes, its people, its play of life are of a time when the world was young; when men and women were still naïve and simple; when, to their child-like wonder and creative imaginations, wind and rain and thunder and ocean and sun and stars had human voices and spoke a human language; when there was so much room for life that the earth seemed to laugh and cry with her children. They were not exempt from the experiences of sorrow and the pain of life; but they treated

## ***THE PLEASURE OF***

them, as all children will, as temporary obstructions on the broad flowing river, which could be set aside through courage and endeavour and faith in the abiding deities. If events happened otherwise than they wished or hoped, it was well, for the gods knew best, and they had played their part bravely and truly. If death came, it was well also; for if the spear had been cast by Diomedes or by Hector it was Athene or it was Hera who had guided it. They lived simply but sternly; they were passionate lovers and passionate friends; noble fathers and splendid husbands: they were good haters and good fighters, loyal heroes in peace or in war. And they bred Homer. What Achilles and Agamemnon and Patroclus and Ajax and Diomedes did in many acts, Homer accomplished in one transcendent act—in the *Iliad*. In this

## *READING POETRY*

poem he not only sang his song of praise for the heroic souls of Achilles and his companions, but he precipitated a national life in everlasting words. He embodied the gods of his land and set the standard for the heroic life which inspired the Greeks for a millennium. And he established the reality of the ideal in art and life. All that Greece has given us, and all she gave that has not been recovered, both in art and thought, had its fount of inspiration in this almost marvellous achievement in poetry; in the spirit of suggestion which blooms in almost every line, and in the poet's dramatically embodying genius. His men and women live, whether in sorrow or anger, in passion or play. They are not coloured shadows flitting across a white page, but creatures of flesh and blood, moving under sunny skies. From an-

## ***THE PLEASURE OF***

other side Homer's poem was to the ancient Greeks what the Old Testament was to the ancient Jews—their moral code and standard of conduct. The lessons taught by the anger of Achilles against Agamemnon and its dire result on the Grecian army; by the overwhelming love of Achilles for his friend Patroclus; by his noble sympathy for Priam in his sorrow; by the pathos of his coming doom in spite of his great heart; by the sublime serenity of spirit in which all Homer's heroes accept life and fate;—the lessons the Greeks derived from these became bountifully manifest in their later life as a nation, in the tragedies of Æschylus, the comedies of Aristophanes, the dialogues of Plato, the sculptures of Praxiteles and Phidias, the campaigns of Alexander, the building of the Acropolis and the Parthenon, and in

## *READING POETRY*

their worship of beauty. And what we ourselves owe to the Greeks no one man can adequately express. ✓

If you now ask what Homer, the poet, will do for you, I can only answer that what he did three thousand years ago he is doing to-day. If you do not know this it is because you have been occupying yourself with dead things, and have not realized the living power of poetry. Indeed, though you may not know it, what is best in yourself and in your life has grown there nurtured by the hidden influences that the stream of thought has carried down the ages from these same Hellenic springs.

One thing, however, Homer will certainly do for you, if you read him for pleasure: he will keep you young. You will miss the magnificent music of his language if you do not know Greek; but

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

read him in the prose version of Butcher, Lang and Myers, and follow that with Lord Derby's version in order to taste a little of the flavour of the poetry. When you have done this, begin again: and then begin all over again, and continue until you feel heroic presences about you, and become imbued with what Matthew Arnold called his "high seriousness." Young people, especially, should read Homer. He has made even more heroes than he has sung. The glory of him is catching to the youthful mind, which sees the fact ideally and surrounds it with what we are pleased to call a romantic atmosphere. That is just what Homer did; that is what makes his facts alive; and that is why his interpretation comes to us as a revelation.

Some six hundred years after Homer sang, there was born at Eleusis the man

## READING POETRY

“who picked up the fragments from the mighty feasts of Homer,” and remoulded them into poems of tragedy which have never been surpassed, and have been equalled by our own Shakespeare alone in one or two of his plays. People in those days said that Æschylus had been inspired by Dionysus in a dream; otherwise they could not explain how he wrote his wonder-working masterpieces. Sophocles told him that “he did what he ought to do, but he did it without knowing.” What they meant may be appreciated if we have read our Shakespeare as we ought to read him, and if we have felt the sublime imaginative power of Job. **A** The tragedies of Æschylus have occupied the thoughts of many writers; but the English reader will do wisely if he read Symonds’ “The Greek Poets,” before he attempts the plays, either in the



## THE PLEASURE OF.

originals or in translations. Symonds' exposition of the trilogy of the *Oresteia* is masterly. I wish I had his knowledge and gifts to suggest even what Æschylus means as a tragic poet. The concentrated pathos with which we are overwhelmed in witnessing the suffering brought about by human passion in play against the forces which hold the universe, is realized in these tragedies with an art so consummate, that as art it is unique in literature. We can but bow our heads in fear and trembling as before some awful deity. What Swinburne says of attempting to compare *King Lear* with *Othello* may be quoted to express the sense of helplessness in trying to estimate the special quality of the poetry of Æschylus. "The result, for any reader of human intelligence and decent humility in sight of what is

## READING POETRY

highest in the spiritual world, must always be a sense of adoring doubt and exalting hesitation." Moved by this sense, let us accept Æschylus for whatsoever we may find in him. The pleasure he can give us is poignant, but, rightly taken, bracing and purifying as an Alpine climb.

What Homer is to epic, and Æschylus to tragic poetry, that is Aristophanes to comic poetry. Here, again, if we would taste the real flavour of this rampant and lyric spirit, Shakespeare will help us. But, as Mr. Symonds points out:

"We must not expect to find the gist of Aristophanes in vivid portraits of character, in situations borrowed from every-day life, in witty dialogue, in carefully constructed plots arriving at felicitous conclusions. All these elements, indeed, he has; but these are not the main

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

points of his art. His plays are not comedies in the sense in which we use the word, but scenic allegories. Titanic forces in which the whole creation is turned upside down; transcendental travesties, enormous orgies of wild fancy and unbridled imagination; Dionysiac dances in which tears are mingled with laughter, and fire with wine; choruses that, underneath their oceanic merriment of leaping waves, hide silent deeps of unstirred thought."

There is pleasure in this man, if you like, but you must come well filled with the spirit of Greek life to enjoy him as he should be enjoyed. Symonds tried to suggest the secret of his strength and charm, but confessed his inability to do him justice: "The epithets which continually rise to our lips in speaking of him—radiant, resplendent, swift, keen,

## READING POETRY

cheerful, flashing, magical—carry no real notion of the marvellous and subtle spirit that animates his comedy with life peculiar to itself.” ↵

If you would know the Athens and the Athenians of that day as you know London and Londoners through Falstaff, read these comedies. They are all alive here, high and low, rich and poor, bad and good, mostly bad and somewhat good, but all on pleasure bent and careless of the kind they get. If you read him, then for your soul's sake, read him aright, and not for what may seem to you at first the lewd license of a reckless “sport” whose mouth is continually filled with bawdy jests. This is not Aristophanes as it is not Rabelais, though some nice people have the nasty minds to think it is. Aristophanes laughed his mighty laughter because he felt in the

## THE PLEASURE OF

depths of his great heart and saw with the power of his keen brain what fools we mortals be. Take his pleasure cleanly. If we turn with disgust from pictures of Bacchic frenzy, let us remember that human nature is still human nature, and that what Aristophanes laughed at may still be lurking in our midst, and all the worse because lurking. Let our politicians read the *Knights*, our lawyers the *Clouds* and *Wasps*, and our literary men the *Frogs*, and our women the *Lysistrata*; and if they do not laugh at themselves, then is the sense of humour in them dead; or else, it may be, they have turned aside to laugh in their sleeves. Well, with Aristophanes, we can also afford to laugh, both with them and at them; he is good to live with.

The splendid resounding music of the Greek epic produced its echo in Rome,

## READING POETRY

in Virgil's poem reciting the adventures of Æneas of Troy. This is not the *Iliad*, nor even the *Odyssey*, though it carries the pathetic note of the latter; but it is a beautiful poem, nevertheless. Its music beat and trembled in the heart of many a noble Roman and sent him proudly walking the Appian Way in conscious dignity of his descent from the gods, and in a conviction of their special protection. The genius of Rome, however, lay not in poetry; it found its best expressions in other ways—in the prose of Livy and Cicero, in statesmanship and generalship and governorship. —

The language of the Latins had to become the language of the Italian people, and the religion of Jupiter had to give way to the religion of Christ, before the genius of Italy partook of the "high seriousness" of Homer's poetic genius.

## THE PLEASURE OF

ties have never before or since been exemplified in anything approaching the degree of perfection of the *Divine Comedy*. "Serenest of the progeny of God," Browning calls him:

*"Pacer of the shore  
Where gluttoned hell disgorgeth filthiest gloom,  
Unbitten by its whirling sulphur-spume—  
Or whence the grieved and obscure waters slope  
Into a darkness quieted by hope;  
Plucker of amaranth, grown beneath God's eye,  
In gracious twilight, where His chosen lie."*

Scarce a century after Dante's death, and contemporary with Dante's first commentator, Boccaccio, an altogether new and fresh poetic voice sang, and in a language that had up to then but lisped in numbers. The voice was the English voice of Geoffrey Chaucer. It had not the sonority of the Greek nor the liquidness of the Italian; but its musical quality was very pleasant to the ears of the

## *READING POETRY*

tough and rough Englishmen of dale and dell who had scarce heard of the existence of Homer or Dante. The printer was still playing with his craft, or experimenting with moulding molten metal; and scholars were still busy searching the dusty scriptoria of the monasteries on the continent. Chaucer came just when people were awaking from a deep sleep. His songs and tales helped to open their eyes more widely, so that they began to see how goodly a thing it was for brethren to dwell together; to feel that life was good also, and that the land was kindly and sweet and lovely in many ways. Chaucer's heart was big and warm. He had a smiling face and a cheery word for the poor man, and an Englishman's respectful reverence for the nobleman. He did his daily work like an honest citizen, but when that was



## ***THE PLEASURE OF***

large his field of enjoyment that his poems are a living panorama of the life of England of his day. Men and women in all stations and of all degrees—knight, nun, monk, clerk, franklin, squire, prioress, pardoner, shipman, and merchant, parson and lawyer, miller and reeve—all live again by the magic of his creative imagination. “Here is God’s plenty,” exclaimed Dryden; that is the very phrase to sum up Chaucer’s work—“God’s plenty.” Partake of this plenty, if you seek for the pleasure of poetry, in the *Canterbury Tales*, the *House of Fame*, the *Legend of Good Women*. They exude the juices of fat beeves, full kine and ripe fruits. The atmosphere in which we realize them is that of “mellow fruitfulness,” as if they had grown to ripeness as “close-bosomed friends of the maturing sun.” The light that is re-

## READING POETRY

flected from them is like the droppings of honeycombs.

Chaucer is properly the founder of the English language; he broadened its stream and sent it flowing in volume and fulness to Spenser and Marlowe and Shakespeare. An example of his use of it which may also serve to illustrate the temper of the man is well worth quoting. It is the Englishman, Chaucer's Good Counsel:

*“ Flee from the press, and dwell with soothfastness;*

*Suffice thee thy good, though it be small;  
For hoard hath hate, and climbing tickleness:  
Press hath envy, and wealth is blinded all.  
Savour no more than thee behovë shall;  
Do well thyself that other folk canst rede;  
And truth thee shall deliver, it is no dread.*

*“ Painë thee not each crookèd to redress  
In trust of her that turneth as a ball.  
Greatë rest stands in little business.  
Beware also to spurn against a nail.*

## THE PLEASURE OF

hearts will be touched so that your inward ear will catch something to hold dear for the rest of life. And it will be borne to you in exquisite music:

*“ Weep no more, woful Shepherds, weep no more,*

*For Lycidas your sorrow is not dead,  
Sunk though he be beneath the wat’ry floor,  
So sinks the day-star in the Ocean bed,  
And yet anon repairs his drooping head,  
And tricks his beams, and with new spangled  
ore*

*Flames in the forehead of the morning sky:  
So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high,  
Through the dear might of him that walk’d  
the waves,*

*Where other groves, and other streams along,  
With nectar pure his oozy locks he laves,  
And hears the unexpressive nuptial song,  
In the blest Kingdoms meek of joy and love.*

*“ Thus sang the uncouth swain to the oaks and  
rills,*

*While the still morn went out with sandals  
grey,*

## READING POETRY

*He touch'd the tender stops of various quills,  
With eager thought warbling his Doric lay:  
And now the sun had stretch'd out all the  
hills,  
'And now was dropt into the western bay;  
At last he rose, and twitched his mantle blue:  
To-morrow to fresh woods, and pastures new."*

“To-morrow to fresh woods and pastures new.” The to-morrow broke, the sun “flaming the forehead of the morning sky” with the “new spangled ore” of Blake, Burns, Keats and Shelley. Wordsworth also came, but the dawn of his advent was clouded, and only now is his sun filling a new day with its effulgent light.

The mystery of this enchanter spirit of poetry grows with the growing line of the poets themselves. We ask ourselves: how comes this spirit? Whence comes it?

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

the soul of pain glowing in the joy of love, as a ship-wrecked sailor on a stormy sea might see and feel the glowing ball of light, thrown to him by an approaching ship, rising out of the darkness, these songs leave us staring with wide eyes. There is nothing to say. All that we would say and cannot say reverberates in the mind and lingers in the heart. The secret of the mystery of pain seems for a moment to unfold itself; but the next moment it is gone. But the poem is still there; so that we may, if we will, recover the experience to spell out, for our soul's sake, the meaning of the mystery that surrounds us.

Perhaps we touch the heart of the spirit of poetry, if we say, with Plato, that she is born of divine power, and that all good poets compose their beautiful poems when inspired and possessed.

## READING POETRY

Perhaps the strings, so to speak, of the poet's soul are sometimes so stretched by emotion that, like the Æolian harp, music flows from them at the least breath of the winds of circumstance. But if we accept either suggestion we are still face to face with the problem of the poet's *art*, with the fact that the poet does consciously *shape* his songs. Plato would not acknowledge that the poet did compose his poems as works of art; he considered poetic inspiration akin to madness. Æschylus may have been mad when he wrote the *Agamemnon*; if so, it was a remarkable form of madness to give us what is acknowledged to be the perfect type of tragic dramatic art. They said Blake also was mad; it must have been some divine madness, then, that produced the *Songs of Innocence*. Was Burns also mad when he wrote *Ye*

## THE PLEASURE OF

*banks and braes o' bonnie Doon, Highland Mary, Tam O'Shanter, and The Jolly Beggars?* Was Keats mad when he sang his *Ode to a Nightingale*, his *Ode to Autumn*, his *Ode to a Grecian Urn*? Was Shelley mad in the *Epipsy-chidion*, the *Ode to the West Wind* and the *Triumph of Life*?

I have already touched on this mystery of poetry, and I am compelled to the only satisfying explanation in assuming that the poet as man and the poet as artist are two different beings; that what the man lives is gathered in by the poet for the stuff of his poetry, which he consciously weaves, with the aid of his creative imagination, into poems. Further, that the purpose of his art, as of all art, is fulfilled by *our* creative imagination, which refashions the poet's experiences and suggestions into forms of our

## READING POETRY

own emotions. Here we tap the springs of the pleasure derived from the reading of poetry: we taste the poet's joy in creating. This is the pleasure we feel. That poetry can affect different people in different ways is due to the fact that what the poet reveals is truth in the form of beauty. I am not using these words in any transcendental sense. It is beauty, because of the power of his art to make its appeal universal; and it is truth, because of its power to call forth a universal response. That is why the poet sings of love, of joy, of sorrow, of nature, of the struggle between the forces of passion and the forces of circumstance. This is what the poet *means*, and *all* that he means. The *value* of his poetry is for us to determine. If we have found pleasure in the songs, then it is for us to do our part; and that part is to re-ex-



## ***THE PLEASURE OF READING***

press what the poet said in music, in terms of life—in doing and being. It is we who must justify the poet. It is what we are unconsciously doing all the time; and that is why the poet is content to labour and to wait. But we would do better by responding more quickly. We miss so much joy by our procrastination; and life is not too long.

*“ O Wind!*

*If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind? ”*

**IV**

**THE PLEASURE OF  
READING SHAKESPEARE**



THE PLEASURE OF READING  
SHAKESPEARE



**I**F I were asked what books should be read, by way of preparation, before entering on the reading of Shakespeare's plays, I should answer unhesitatingly, Lamb's "Tales from Shakespeare," and a few essays Lamb wrote, in particular the essay "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare, Considered with Reference to their Fitness for Stage Presentation." I single out Lamb, in this connection, though he is not what may be termed a professional writer on Shakespeare, because of the sanity and sureness of his critical insight, perhaps the sanest and surest of all the critics who have expounded the

## ***THE PLEASURE OF***

master. And, in saying this, I am not forgetting the valuable "whole volumes in folio" which have been indited, from Dryden and Pope to Johnson and Coleridge, down to Dowden, Brandes and Bradley. Of course, no student of Shakespeare can afford to ignore Coleridge. He did such splendid pioneer work, in this now much-travelled land, that the roads he made must be the highways for all who would follow to study. But the general reader will not concern himself so seriously; he is reading for pleasure, and the experience which is to come to him by the wayside. For him Lamb is a charming and delightful guide. He himself went to enjoy the Promised Land, and he enjoyed it thoroughly. I need hardly say that he knew how to tell us of what he saw.

Lamb was quite a different being from

## *READING SHAKESPEARE*

the worthy gentleman who dissects and analyzes texts, useful and harmless as such work must be; nor was he given to drawing "out the thread of his verbosity finer than the staple of his argument." He had a love for literature and, gifted as he was with a fine discrimination and sympathetic power of insight, he came to know and to love Shakespeare and his plays. In knowing them he found that his mind had become enriched, his spirit refreshed and his nature enlarged. Such an experience was too good to keep to himself—that was not Lamb's way—so Lamb sat himself down to tell us how he got it; and in telling us this, he tries to make us go and do likewise. His way is not his friend Coleridge's way; but he "gets there," as they say in the marketplace, notwithstanding. In the essay I have named Lamb is upholding the ar-

## ***THE PLEASURE OF***

gument that Shakespeare's plays are incompatible with stage representation. I take leave to quote one paragraph, from which it will be seen that Lamb knew his subject to the centre, and that he could rise to its dignity in dignity.

"We talk," he says, "of Shakespeare's admirable observation of life, when we should feel that, not from a petty inquiry into those cheap and every-day characters which surrounded him, as they surround us, but from his own mind, which was, to borrow a phrase of Ben Jonson's, the very 'sphere of humanity,' he fetched those images of virtue and of knowledge, of which everyone of us, recognizing a part, think we comprehend in our natures the whole; and oftentimes mistake the powers which he positively creates in us for nothing more than the indigenous faculties of our minds, which

## READING SHAKESPEARE

only waited the application of corresponding virtues in him to return a full and clear echo of the same."

Two other books I would also recommend: the first for its value as a summary of Shakespeare's life and his work as poet and dramatist; the second for its new and remarkable presentment of Shakespeare the man as evinced by his work.

Mr. Walter Raleigh's short monograph on *Shakespeare* is the best thing of its kind in the language. It is quite free from academic pedantry or bibliographic dryasdustry, failings which mar so many of the works devoted to Shakespeare. Mr. Raleigh is an enthusiast, but he is self-possessed, ably appreciative, and gently judicious; and he is also gifted with a style of writing at once captivating and suggestive.



## THE PLEASURE OF

Mr. Frank Harris's *The Man Shakespeare* is profoundly interesting as an original attempt to create the man out of the material collected from the plays and sonnets. Whether we agree or no with Mr. Harris's conclusions, there can be no question of the extraordinary interest excited in us by the unique treatment he has given his subject. He has given a new, and living, and, I might almost say, a sacred value to the writings of Shakespeare. No reader can part from this book without obtaining, at the same time, a vivid mental picture of what Shakespeare may have been, and, perhaps, must have been like. It is a remarkable achievement.

Having made himself familiar, by means of these books, with the general outlines of Shakespeare's life, and thus obtained an impression of the spirit in

## *READING SHAKESPEARE*

which he wrote, the reader will be prepared to open Shakespeare's own book. He may now try and find out for himself what the world sees in this man that is so transcendent, and what of truth there is in the judgment which declares him to be the finest flower of human genius, and in the praise that descants of his infinite power to delight and make wise.

Opinion has so dignified Shakespeare that he "sits 'mongst men like a descended god." Opinion is not quite wise in this attitude. We shall never receive from Shakespeare what his writings have to give us if we give way to the temptation, strong as it undoubtedly is with us common folk, to apotheosize the man. We are somewhat overfond of doing this, and we lose thereby far more than we gain. If Mr. Harris's book do no

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

more than shake us from this bad habit, it will have accomplished much. Shakespeare was a man, and spoke our language. He knew joys similar to those we know, and lived through sorrows common to humanity. That he dealt with these joys and sorrows in the fashion he did, proves him to have been a remarkably uncommon man—but still a man. Then why set him on an Olympus and dream of him as though he were a god's disembodied spirit "out-topping knowledge"? He would not have asked us for such worship had we known him in the flesh. Ben Jonson said he was "of an open and free nature," and Ben Jonson knew him better than did any other man of his time. Was he not also called "the gentle Shakespeare"? He may have been prone to melancholy; his disposition was such that "above all

## READING SHAKESPEARE

other strifes" it "contended especially to know himself," and the knowledge brought him its wisdom. He says so himself, speaking out of the mouth of Edgar in *King Lear*, and the beautiful words reveal Shakespeare to us:

*"A most poor man, made tame to fortune's  
blows,  
Who by the art of knowing and feeling sor-  
rows  
Am pregnant to good pity."*

With the Duke in *Measure for Measure*, he rather rejoiced "to see another merry, than merry at anything which professed to make him rejoice." Like his Hamlet, he was "most generous and free from all contrivings." There was that within him which "passeth show," but his genius was equal to the task of revealing it, and he took us into his secrets, treating us as equals, and hiding

## THE PLEASURE OF

nothing from those who have eyes to see  
and hearts to feel:

*“ When he speaks,  
The air, a charter'd libertine, is still,  
And the mute wonder lurketh in men's ears  
To steal his sweet and honey'd sentences.”*

His life was spent in the midst of the busy world, wearing his motley as an actor, eating his meals with friends, and drinking with them also. It may be he was speaking of himself when he tells us of Henry V:

*“. . . his addiction was to courses vain;  
His companions unletter'd, rude, and shallow;  
His hours fill'd up with riots, banquets, sports;  
And never noted in him any study,  
Any retirement, any sequestration  
From open haunts and popularity.”*

Actors and actor-companions, in those days, were not of the best society, and few of them could be called cultured.

## *READING SHAKESPEARE*

Nor were actors then in the happy circumstances they are in to-day. They did not knight actors in the Elizabethan and Jacobean times. He knew a nobleman or two, but they were patrons, not friends. He knew better the Bardolphs, the Nymms, the Pistols, and a Falstaff; and these he could know only in taverns and in "open haunts." He was a generous, virile lover, loving well if not wisely. He was a wit among his friends at the Mermaid tavern. If he did foolish things in the heyday of his young manhood, he was no fool.

It is to do Shakespeare a grievous wrong and ourselves also, to relegate him, as we do, to an Alpine loneliness of royal state. We take him away from where he belongs; from the press of the world's fight, and from the hearts of the people. His book also we have wronged.

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

As we have treated the Bible, so we have made an idol of his book, and have sinned the sin of idolatry. Ben Jonson worshipped him "this side idolatry," but we overstep the line. Our conduct would be less open to criticism did we really act from awful conviction; but we rarely read his book. We prefer to subscribe for a sumptuous edition of his works—the more sumptuous the better for our purpose—and place it in a gilded cage to decorate our rooms. Instead of knowing the man and filling ourselves from the springs of his wisdom and joy, we accept authority's word, and take for granted the man's greatness and his book's worth. We are content to repeat the scraps of borrowed wisdom which fall from the lips of teachers and players. Were we acquainted with the living settings from which these scraps have been

## READING SHAKESPEARE

stolen we might, perhaps, be touched to fine issues. We worship in blindness and ignorance; and because of this we lose the helping sympathy and the enriching experience of the lordliest joy-giver, the wisest spirit, and the greatest-hearted man who ever trod this earth. It is time we left off reading what other people have to say about Shakespeare, and began to read what Shakespeare has to say for himself. Let us give up atoning for our neglect in raising monuments to him and his book. We never can build a finer monument than the one he has built for himself:

*“Not marble nor the gilded monuments  
Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme.”*

Let us atone by reading his book. Let us all—poor and rich and ignorant as well as those who are wise—justify him in what he said to his friend:



## THE PLEASURE OF

*“Your monument shall be my gentle verse,  
Which eyes not yet created shall o’er read;  
And tongues to be your being shall rehearse,  
When all the breathers of this world are dead;  
You still shall live—such virtue has my pen—  
Where breath most breathes—even in the  
mouths of men.”*

In reading Shakespeare we must always bear in mind that we are reading poems. Shakespeare was far more a poet than he was a dramatist. We are apt to forget this because of the drama-forms, and because the persons of the play, in proportion as they are alive for us, for the moment, interest us more by what they are doing than by what they are saying. A second or a third reading may help to dispel this illusion, and leave us free to enjoy the poem, or, in other words, to obtain the poetic experiences. Reading will give us these experiences, when acting would not. Lamb con-

## **READING SHAKESPEARE**

tended that "the plays of Shakespeare are less calculated for performance on a stage than those of any other dramatist whatsoever." And he was right. "Their distinguished excellence is a reason that they should be so. There is so much in them, which comes not under the province of acting, with which eye, and tone, and gesture have nothing to do."

Exactly. And the "so much in them" is the poetry; the spirit of suggestion which is the life of poetry; the spirit that we ourselves must alone realize and experience. The actor interferes with us in this work; indeed he actually opposes us. And he is but doing what he must do, if his art be anything to him. His business is to express as perfectly as he can his own art, not the poem. The art of acting is directed mainly to the eye, and but

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

slightly to the imagination. Where it does affect the imagination it is taken up with suggestions made by the acting and not by the poem, and the experiences we have from these suggestions are not poetic experiences. The two are entirely different. When we try to obtain both at the same time we find that the more immediate coarser impression on the eye made by the players, overpowers the more delicate impression on the mind made by the poem. Scenery also is another distracting influence, though we are not affected by this in reading. Lamb said, that scenery "works quite a contrary effect to what is intended. That which in comedy, or plays of familiar life, adds so much to the life of the imitation, in plays which appeal to the higher faculties, positively destroys the illusion which it is intended to aid."

## READING SHAKESPEARE

The more realistic the scenery the more is the eye taken up with it. There is no time in the quick progress of the play for the mind to do more than respond to what the eye gives it. The poem as poem is scarcely realized at all. So that we leave the theatre with an impression of the *performance* and not of the *poem*. An audience in Shakespeare's time had the advantage over us. All it saw of the scene was a placard reading the stage directions now printed in the book of the plays, thus: "Belmont, Avenue to Portia's House," "A Room in Petruccio's House," "The Forest of Arden." The imagination was appealed to, and left the mind less disturbed in its work of experiencing the poet's art. The actors, of course, had to be there. But I would go so far as to do away even with these, at any rate as visible to the au-

## THE PLEASURE OF

dience. A properly lighted theatre with a thin dark-tinted curtain covering the stage opening, and the actors reading the play behind the curtain, invisible to the eye, would be all that were necessary. I believe that audiences would be most deeply impressed by thus listening to, say, *King Lear*, *Othello*, *The Tempest*, *Cymbeline*, or even *Henry IV* and *Richard III*, if competent readers were selected for the fine quality of their voices. The plays would come as revelations. Moreover, we could then hear them all, and in their entirety, not emasculated and shorn of half their virtue by ignorant managers. We exercise ourselves to a pitch of almost rabid excitement in devising clean and uplifting pleasures to be enjoyed on our deadly Sundays. I can conceive of no more delightful way in which to spend three hours out of the

## *READING SHAKESPEARE*

barren twelve of a Sunday's daylight, than in listening to such a reading of one of Shakespeare's plays. The plays to be known must be lived as poems. Since we cannot do this in the theatre, let us do it in our own homes.

In the previous chapter I tried to suggest what was the pleasure poetry gave us. I tried to show that the poet's aim, if he had any aim at all, was to express experience so that we, reading the poem, should live the experience as he lived it. In other words, the measure of his creative imagination was found to be in the vividness with which we realized the poet's relation with the ideal, and in the strength of the impulse imparted to our imaginations toward the realization of truth as beauty. This, I thought, was the purpose of poetry, if poetry had any purpose.

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

How does Shakespeare fulfil this in us?

If the sonnets tell us anything they tell us that Shakespeare lived through a tragedy of his own. To think of the sonnets otherwise is to reckon him a dilettante in verse. The tragedy must have shaken him in every fibre of his being—the sonnets show us that. It affected a naturally gentle nature to a sweet melancholy that found its expression through those higher natures he created in his plays, for whom life offered problems to be solved. In the sonnets, this tragedy expresses itself first as the agonizing cry of a deeply wounded man; in the end it affected the man to a beautiful confession of the grace that Love had blessed him with. Love had been his sin, he said, but Love had redeemed him. In the process of this

## READING SHAKESPEARE

redemption the supreme lyric power in him had "changed the tear to a pearl, which remains to decorate new sorrows." In this exquisite sentence Professor Raleigh holds the sonnets in solution. His continuing words most finely precipitate their spirit: "Their occasion is a thing of the past: their theme is eternal. The tragedy of which they speak is the topic and inspiration of all poetry, it is the triumph of Time, marching relentlessly over the ruin of human ambitions and human desires." Shakespeare was made of no common stuff. He had a resolved spirit in him, and the work he did later justified him in the defiance and resolution expressed in the sonnet:—

*"No, Time, thou shalt not boast that I do  
change:*

*Thy pyramids built up with newer might*



## THE PLEASURE OF

*To me are nothing novel, nothing strange;  
They are but dressings of a former sight.  
Our dates are brief, and therefore we admire  
What thou dost foist upon us that is old;  
And rather make them born to our desire  
Than think that we before have heard them  
told.*

*Thy registers and thee I both defy,  
Not wondering at the present nor the past,  
For thy records and what we see doth lie,  
Made more or less by thy continual haste.  
This I do vow and this shall ever be;  
I will be true, despite thy scythe and thee."*

His love shall endure, he avers, in the sonnet previous to this, because it is not "subject to Time's love or to Time's hate." No, "it was builded far from accident," and will not fall "under the blow of thrall'd discontent"; nor does it fear policy, "that heretic, which works on leases of short-number'd hours,"

*"But all alone stands hugely politic,  
That it nor grows with heat nor drowns with  
showers.*

## READING SHAKESPEARE

*To this I witness call the fools of time,  
Which die for goodness, who have lived for  
crime."*

"When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child: now that I am become a man, I have put away childish things." Shakespeare, in his sonnets, had sung himself into manhood. This is the way of the poet—to accept the bludgeonings of circumstance and to remain captain of his soul. Then out of his sorrow to create a joy, a living object, "a wonderful deathless ditty" to move us to fashion our glory also; "the tear changed to a pearl, which remains to decorate new sorrows."

The poet is greater than his poems; for a poem is but one moment's ornament, while the poet, impregnated by every emanation of nature's activity, is ever conceiving. He only waits that he

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

may deliver the new life as a thing of beauty. So fecund is he that the body becomes worn out long before the spirit has completed its song cycle. The man Shakespeare died young, as we count years, yet his last work was greater than his first, and all were the product of a spirit that seemed to revel in its super-human power of combining elements into new and beautiful compounds. Always it is the poet singing—of love and its joys and sorrows, of the play of circumstance on the human effort, of victory and defeat, of emancipation from the thralldom of sense and of the thralldom itself—but always singing. This lyric character in him is important, because it is Shakespeare's own voice. The lyrical voice is always the personality itself speaking. He imparts it to the men and women of his plays. In whatsoever

## READING SHAKESPEARE

circumstances they may be, they no sooner feel the stress of life or the joy of it, than the poet asserts himself in them and they speak the lyrical language. Othello in the net of Iago's Mephistophelian weaving literally chants his agony:

*“ Like to the Pontic Sea,  
Whose icy current and compulsive course  
Ne'er feels retiring ebb, but keeps due on  
To the Propontic and the Hellespont,  
Even so my bloody thoughts, with violent pace,  
Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love,  
Till that a capable and wide revenge  
Swallow them up.”*

Then, later, when he has realized the weakness of his own soul before a common intriguer's suggestions:

*“ Are there no stones in heaven  
But what serves for the thunder . . . .*

. . . .

*I am not valiant neither,  
But every puny whipster gets my sword.*

. . . .

## THE PLEASURE OF.

*Who can control his fate?*

. . .

*O cursed, cursed slave!*

*Whip me, ye devils,  
From the possession of this heavenly sight!  
Blow me about in winds! Roast me in sulphur!  
Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!  
O Desdemona! dead, Desdemona, dead!"*

King Lear, in his terrible madness, rises to the height of the poet's Voice from the Whirlwind, which spoke to Job:

*"Blow winds, and crack your cheeks! rage!  
blow!*

*You cataracts and hurricanes, spout  
Till you have drenched our steeples, drown'd  
the cocks!*

*You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,  
Vaunt couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts,  
Singe my white beard. And thou, all-shak-  
ing thunder,*

*Smite flat the thick rotundity of the world!  
Crack nature's moulds, all germens spill at  
once,*

*That make ingrateful man."*

## READING SHAKESPEARE

And Edgar's words:

*"The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices  
Make instruments to plague us."*

Macbeth, after he has killed Duncan, asks his wife why he could not say "Amen" to the prayers he heard in the second chamber. He scarcely hears her answer, but wanders off into a song in praise of sleep:

*"Methought I heard a voice say 'Sleep no  
more!  
Macbeth does murder sleep,' the innocent  
sleep,  
Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care,  
The death of each day's life, sore labour's  
bath,  
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second  
course,  
Chief nourisher in life's feast."*

When Macbeth hears of his wife's death, the news sends him soliloquizing a psalm:

## THE PLEASURE OF

*“ To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,  
Creeps in this petty space from day to day  
To the last syllable of recorded time;  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief  
candle!*

*That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
And then is heard no more. It is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.”*

Hamlet is always singing under the stress of conflicting thoughts. Jaques, the melancholy onlooker at life's merry-making, sings his reflections. Duke Vincentio, in *Measure for Measure*, waiting expectantly for Isabel and Mariana to come to an understanding, is moved to a chanting exclamation against the city, so full of wickedness, over which he reigns:

*“ O place and greatness! millions of false eyes  
Are stuck upon thee: volumes of report*

## READING SHAKESPEARE

*Run with these false and most contrarious  
quests*

*Upon thy doings: thousands escapes of wit  
Make thee the father of their idle dreams  
And rack in thee their fancies."*

This same lyrical impulse seizes Shakespeare when he writes of what moves him deeply, of what affected his nature most profoundly. Music, women, love appealed to him so strongly that the strings of his heart-lyre were instantly set vibrating. He never refers to music, but his language expresses the very refinement of poetic experience:

*"How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this  
bank!*

*Here will we sit, and let the sounds of music  
Creep in our ears; soft stillness and the night  
Become the touches of sweet harmony.*

*Sit, Jessica: Look how the floor of heaven  
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold.  
There's not the smallest orb which thou be-  
holdest*



## THE PLEASURE OF

*But in his motion like an angel sings,  
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubims,  
Such harmony is in immortal souls;  
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay  
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it."*

Note the reflective, melancholy Shakespeare coming in at the close of the poet's rhapsody. Compare this again with the Duke's words, in *Twelfth Night*, on the same subject, and note the delicacy of the appetite which will not be cloyed:—

*"If music be the food of love, play on;  
Give me excess of it, that surfeiting  
The appetite may sicken, and so die.  
That strain again;—it had a dying fall:  
Oh, it came o'er my ears like the sweet south  
That breathes upon a bank of violets,  
Stealing and giving odour,—Enough! No  
more,  
'Tis not so sweet now as it was before."*

Woman and the beauty in woman were, perhaps, Shakespeare's most potent in-

## READING SHAKESPEARE

spirations. He delighted to sing her praise, and revelled in every manifestation of her grace and fine spirit. There is such feeling in his language that "his words are bonds" binding him to the thing, and "his oaths oracles" telling of his heart's deepest pulses:—

*"O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!  
Her beauty hangs upon the cheek of night  
Like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear;  
Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!"*

Thus Romeo of Juliet. Then Othello of Desdemona:

*"Thou cunning'st pattern of excelling nature,  
I know not where is that Promethean heat  
That can thy light relume. When I have  
pluck'd the rose,  
I cannot give it vital growth again,  
It needs must wither:—I'll smell it on the  
tree.  
Ah, balmy breath, that dost almost persuade  
Justice to break her sword."*

## **THE PLEASURE OF**

What Cleopatra's beauty was like may be imagined from Enorbarbus's words:

*“ Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale  
Her infinite variety: other women cloy  
The appetites they feed: but she makes  
hungry  
Where most she satisfies.”*

Iachimo, in Imogen's sleeping-chamber, turns poet at the sight of the beauty and purity of the lovely lady lying asleep:

*“ Cytherea,  
How bravely thou becomest thy bed, fresh lily,  
And whiter than the sheets. That I might  
touch!  
But kiss; one kiss! Rubies unparagon'd  
How dearly they do't! 'Tis her breathing  
that  
Perfumes the chamber thus! the flame o' the  
taper  
Bows toward her, and would under-peep her  
lids,  
To see the enclosed lights, now canopied  
Under these windows, white and azure-laced  
With blue of heaven's own tint.”*

## *READING SHAKESPEARE*

Shakespeare must have had a large slice of his mother in him; for if there is one characteristic in his writings that is stronger than the many others they display, it is his finely delicate appreciation of women. He writes of them in living words, and they talk living words. Iago is a piece of intellectualization, astonishingly realized and terribly clever; but we feel instinctively that this villain is an elaboration and not a creation. Imogen springs, like Aphrodite from the foam, straight out of the poet's throbbing heart. She comes, inevitable, splendid in all her beauty of form and soul, as though she had stepped out of a living past into the living present. All Shakespeare's women, except perhaps Lady Macbeth, possess this radiance of immortality. They seem as if they had never been dead, as if Shakespeare had

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

just simply recovered them for us. This supreme power came from something more than the workings of the mere imagination with the stuff of experience—though experience, of course, was vital. The man's own nature, it must have been, that contributed to the creation of such women as Marina, Imogen, Cordelia, Rosalind, Miranda, and Cleopatra. Shakespeare's women bear witness to Shakespeare's transcendent creative might; but they give more, a golden-tongued testimony for Shakespeare's kindly, tender and sympathetic heart—the large slice of Mary Arden that was in him. As the poet of love Shakespeare is peerless. There is no secret recess in it that he has not rifled of its riches with which to fill the chalices of his flowers of love. A volume might be made of these flowers alone. I need

## READING SHAKESPEARE

quote but two: in the first, Biron, in *Love's Labour's Lost*, is speaking for Shakespeare:

*“ Other slow arts entirely keep the brain;  
And therefore, finding barren practisers,  
Scarce show a harvest of their heavy toil;  
But love first learnèd in a lady's eyes,  
Lives not alone immured in the brain;  
But, with the motion of all elements,  
Courses as swift as thought in every flower,  
And gives to every power a double power,  
Above their functions and their offices.  
It adds a precious seeing to the eye;  
A lover's eyes will gaze an eagle blind;  
A lover's ear will hear the lowest sound,  
When the suspicious head of theft is stopp'd;  
Love's feeling is more soft and sensible  
Than are the tender horns of cockled snails;  
Love's tongue proves dainty Bacchus gross in  
taste;  
For valour, is not Love a Hercules,  
Still climbing trees in the Hesperides?  
Subtle as Sphinx; as sweet and musical  
As bright Apollo's lute, strung wth his hair;  
And when Love speaks, the voice of all the  
gods,*

## THE PLEASURE OF

*Makes heaven drowsy with the harmony.  
Never durst poet touch a pen to write  
Until his ink were temper'd with Love's sighs;  
O, then his lines would ravish savage ears  
And plant in tyrants mild humility."*

Phebe says to Silvius, in *As You Like It*: "Good shepherd, tell this youth what 'tis to love," and Silvius answers:

*"It is to be all made of sighs and tears;*

. . .

*It is to be all made of faith and service;*

. . .

*It is to be all made of fantasy,  
All made of passion and all made of wishes,  
All adoration, duty, and observance,  
All humbleness, all patience and impatience,  
All purity, all trial, all observance."*

I dwell on Shakespeare the poet because it helps us to realize the man. Poets are poets because they have been men first; men who have known sorrow and were acquainted with grief. Here we touch

## *READING SHAKESPEARE*

hands with them, and the touch is encouraging; because how great spirits have met fate is good for us lesser spirits to know. In his poetry also the poet feels himself freer to confess; his art permits him a larger liberty to lay bare the hidden springs of his nature with dignity and without egotism. It is nothing to the purpose to say that a poet might assume an experience and write from the assumption as if it were native to him. Such writings have sent many poets into "the wastes of time." The experience must be personal and real or the poem is a dead thing. It is in his poems that the man Shakespeare is to be found, and there is a fine pleasure in searching for him there, and rare treasures are to be found by the way.

I dwell particularly on the lyric quality of Shakespeare's poetry, because, as



## THE PLEASURE OF

I have already said, it points to the personal note. It is even more encouraging to see the profoundest searcher of life singing, not alone of his joy, but of his sorrows also. This debonair grace is heartily impressing. Heavy-laden as we are, we can here find rest. Surely there shall be time to listen and take heart if such a man finds the time to sing to give us heart! So that there is a fine pleasure also in listening. This world may be foul in body and infected in nature, but give Shakespeare the opportunity and he will cleanse the one and heal the other. What says his friend Jaques?—

*“ Invest me in my motley; give me leave  
To speak my mind, and I will through and  
through  
Cleanse the foul body of the infected world,  
If they will patiently receive my medicine.”*

Mr. Frank Harris, in his richly sug-

## **READING SHAKESPEARE**

gestive book to which I have referred, writing of this lyric character in Shakespeare's earlier plays, goes on to remark:—

“There is no intenser delight to a lover of letters than to find Shakespeare singing, with happy unconcern, of the things he loved best—not the Shakespeare of Hamlet or Macbeth, whose intellect speaks in critical judgments of men and life, and whose heart we are fain to divine from slight indications; nor Shakespeare the dramatist, who tried now and again to give life to puppets like Coriolanus and Iago, with whom he had little sympathy—but Shakespeare the poet, Shakespeare the lover, Shakespeare whom Ben Jonson called ‘the gentle,’ Shakespeare the sweet-hearted singer, as he lived and suffered and enjoyed.” This is the Shakespeare we want to know—

## THE PLEASURE OF.

the man with the gentle heart, not the man with the mighty intellect; the man who, out of the deeps of his life's turmoil, could rise to be joyous; and to do this not in any specious way, but because he truly made his joy out of the very wreck of experience.

Much has been written on the pessimism of Shakespeare; but the student of his works will easily convince himself that the pessimism was but a temporary phase and was not organic in the man's nature. Melancholy he may have been, and reflective and retiring; but a pessimist, never. There was that period in his life in which he wrote the *Sonnets*, and the great tragedies of *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*. But he had written *Henry IV*, *As You Like It*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *The Tempest*. What had happened to him

## *READING SHAKESPEARE*

was not a change of heart, but a change of experience. It is true, the experience opened his eyes to the meanness, the baseness, the hypocrisy, the infidelity in men and women, the corruption in political life, and the wretched falsity in friendship; but these did not sour him; they rather helped to ripen his great soul. The trials over, he resumed the divine serenity of his gracious nature.

The tragic experiences that befell Shakespeare are common to humanity. It is the cross we all have to bear. Some are not able to bear it, and fall by the wayside; others go on stumbling, with an ill grace, under the load and reach the goal with spirits worn out and nature crabbed. The poet's fine nature, however, is touched to finer issues. He marches to his music and puts his agony into a song. It is well for us that he can

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

so control the tendencies of his passions that they flow into the moulds of art and take on the forms of beauty. Otherwise we should never have learned how to look up. Lesser spirits can but cry out inarticulately, so that we rarely understand what they say; but a poet like Shakespeare is eloquent to the ages. He rouses us by the reverberating might of his resilient words, and the sound is sent echoing along the corridors of Time.

To me the tragedies of Shakespeare are not so much criticisms of life in general, as they are criticisms of Shakespeare himself. Each of them turns on some weakness in the character of the protagonist; and weakness in character is, after all, at the foundation of all human tragedies. In *Hamlet* I see "gentle" Shakespeare's unstableness which shall not prevail. In *Othello* I find love-

## READING SHAKESPEARE

impassioned Shakespeare sending the jealousy in his nature to ride alone to the ultimate destruction of the whole man. In *Timon*, I see let loose an unbridled rage against the falseness and the sycophancy in the world experienced by a man who was "of a free and open nature." In *King Lear* I meet the trustful Shakespeare and the lover Shakespeare, made mad by the world's ingratitude, by the evil in it, by the wretchedness and misery in it, by the terrible suffering in it. His heart is so filled with mixed feelings of compassion and rage that the tears from his eyes scald him like molten lead. Even a woman's love comes too late for him. The voice that "was ever soft, gentle and low" also goes "into the wastes of time."

Shakespeare saved himself from any one of the catastrophes he pictures, by

## *THE PLEASURE OF.*

the qualities of his nature—in particular by his poetic genius. What he might have done without this genius, we may read in the biographies of the world's lesser men who were also finely touched. Shakespeare's genius sent him working with the stuff of his experience and self-knowledge into forms of art, so that he objectified his passions as poems of tragedy. He precipitated his own tragedy in imagination, and thus recovered himself from himself. In this recovery he saw himself as the protagonist of these imaginatively created dramas of life, and thus realized what part he might have played in life's own play had he given way and become Time's fool. He thus also found himself,

*“ A most poor man, made tame to fortune's  
blows;*

## READING SHAKESPEARE

*Who, by the art of known and feeling sorrows,  
Am pregnant to good pity."*

O, rare virtue! He saw with a clearness of insight such as only he possessed the supreme virtue to cultivate, if life is to be lived in masterly self-possession and yet be fruitful in joy:—

*"Men must endure  
Their going hence, even as their coming hither:  
Ripeness is all."*

"Ripeness is all!" That is the splendid jewel in Shakespeare's crown. From its myriad facets the light radiates to dissipate the darkness in which we all grope through life's way.

We may be "such stuff as dreams are made on"; yet, after all, if the dreams are all we know of life, they are real to us. If

*"The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous pal-  
aces,  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,"*



## *THE PLEASURE OF*

the ever-changing beauty of landscape and of sky, the ever-drawing powers of human sympathy and human love; if all these things be but a vision in a sleep; yet if we know no awakening, the vision is the reality. Are we then really dreaming? Is it all a vision? Shakespeare's own life answers the question in the negative. He, the poet, the awakened dreamer, came and touched us and bade us rise and look around and see whether or no this insubstantial pageant has in truth vanished and left not a wrack behind. We rub our eyes and in conscious astonishment begin to realize that here is a new revelation of things; that our dreams were not a tithe as real as are these wonderful beauties we see. Their outlines are the same as those we saw in our dream-visions, but they have taken on living glories, as it were. Landscape

## **READING SHAKESPEARE**

and sky, towers and palaces and temples, friend and lover and brother, all are transfigured in a new and magical light. What has happened? Only this—the poet has recreated our dream-visions by the power of his creative imagination, so that what we saw in our dreams as separate, are now in living relation—we are beginning to realize the poet's experience in our own experience. Then we saw as in a glass darkly, now we know the joy of living.

Shakespeare was right, however. We are dreaming. We allow the procession of Time's glory to march past us to the music of a Dead Man's March in us. It moves before us as a Dance of Death; we the while looking on as shadowy spectres, or sleep-walkers. It is all dark, meaningless, unlovely. And it will remain thus for us so long as we remain

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

deaf to the voice of the poet. Let him be no longer as one crying in the wilderness. Let him not abjure his service, or break his staff, or drown his book. Let us accept his service and the help of his support, and let us treasure the book in our hearts, that it may fill us with its joyous spirit. He offered all with the royal freedom of his bounteous nature:

*“ Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
Admit impediments. Love is not love  
Which alters when it alteration finds,  
Or bends with the remover to remove:—  
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark  
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;  
It is the star to every wandering bark,  
Whose worth’s unknown, although his height  
be taken;  
Love’s not Time’s fool, though rosy lips and  
cheeks  
Within his bending sickle’s compass come;  
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
But bears it out ev’n to the edge of doom:—*

## **READING SHAKESPEARE**

*If this be error, and upon me proved,  
I never writ, nor no man ever loved."*

Would you search further into this man's worth; into this poet's pleasure-giving power? If you would, there is but one thing for you to do—read what he has written.

If I were looking for a foundation on which to build a faith in the existence of the soul and its immortality, I should not seek for it in the fine-spun arguments of schoolmen and philosophers. I should find it at once in the living power of the poet's creative imagination. All Plato's reasonings pale into insignificance beside Plato himself. He is himself the most convincing of all arguments. And Plato was less than Shakespeare.




V

THE PLEASURE OF  
READING NOVELS



## THE PLEASURE OF READING NOVELS

HE novelist, in so far as his work is the product of his creative imagination, is, more or less, a poet. His method, however, is quite different from the poet's. The poet sings; he is a musician as well as a creator. The poet reveals visions; he relates the separated things of life in a unity with an ideal. His art is to produce in us his own experiences of harmony and beauty. The novelist is not a singer; he is a narrator. He is not concerned with an ideal. His language is the prose of the single voice speaking of what is now, or picturing what was once so that it shall seem to be now. His aim



## *THE PLEASURE OF*

is to tell the facts of common experience in such wise as to produce in us an illusion—an illusion that shall affect us as the reality, and that may so work on the imagination as to give pleasure. This is, or should be, his only aim; other aims must tend to deteriorate his art. He may point a moral—political, social, religious—but if his moral obtrude itself so that it overshadows his picture of life or his presentation of character, he is no longer the artist, he is the moralist or reformer. A teller of tales must be a giver of pleasure through the power and charm of his illusions.

Before language had freed itself from the fetters of sense; that is to say, when men and women still called things by names which reflected their personal relationship to them, the poetical experience was the common experience. As

## **READING NOVELS**

with children, the ideal qualities ascribed to things were associated with the words which stood for the things; so that language was poetry. The poet, or the minstrel, was then the teller of tales. His songs told of the deeds of great heroes, their loves, their sorrows, their joys, their battles and conquests. He tried to make them as real as he knew how. That the creative imagination in him sent him doing other things with his facts and made poems out of his tales was inevitable, since that was the only way in which he could tell his tale at all. His child-like imagination weaved make-believes that were the reality. The Biblical writers, Homer, Virgil, the authors of the Scandinavian Sagas and Beowulf were tellers of tales. So were the troubadours, the authors of the *Romaunt of the Rose* and the *Song of Roland*, Chau-

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

cer and Spenser. As tale-tellers they charmed the listener or the reader to the experience of pleasure, by producing an illusion which the imagination accepted as the reality.

Since those days language has undergone a complete change. As life became more real and stern words lost their poetic associations. The relations they originally suggested to things were divorced, just as have been divorced the relations in which we ourselves stood to the world of things. The word in itself is apparently lifeless, even as the thing in itself is apparently lifeless. This divorce between what I might call spirit and matter has thrown us back on our own imaginations. It has compelled us to evolve a method of relating words to each other, so that in the relation there shall come back to our minds the sugges-

## *READING NOVELS*

tions the words themselves once aroused. This relating of words in unison with the things they stand for, is prose. The original simple homogeneity of speech, to employ the Spencerian terminology, has become a complex heterogeneity; but in this process of evolution it has acquired almost infinite possibilities of arrangement by which it fulfils its work of fitting itself to our larger experiences of life.

In its earlier forms this prose, as was to be expected, was uncouth and halting. It was the language of the common people, and took very roundabout ways to get at things. It said in chapters what we should now say in paragraphs. It had not yet acquired the quality, which comes from mere collocation, of appealing to the reader's imagination. We need but to compare the mediæval ro-

## THE PLEASURE OF

mances, such as Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*, and Berner's *Huon of Bordeaux*, with *Robinson Crusoe*, *Gulliver's Travels* and *The Vicar of Wakefield*, to see what a difference there is between the prose of that time and the prose of a few centuries later; to become aware of the remarkable facility of arrangement of words acquired in that comparatively short interval—a short interval, when we remember that people were making themselves into nations as well as learning how to speak and write. Yet De Foe, Swift and Goldsmith were only the founders of our English prose. Since their days it has developed even more remarkably, so that in the hands of a Thackeray or a George Meredith it expresses the most delicate shades and nuances of thought and experience and emotion. The change has been equally

## READING NOVELS

remarkable in French prose, from the "long-winded" romances like *Sir Launcelot du Lac* to the delicate, crisp, and brilliant writing of Pierre Loti and Anatole France.

If, as I say, we have lost the original poetic suggestiveness in words, we have certainly made ample compensation by creating prose, and especially the full and rich and meaningful prose of the English language. Our language is freer, more accomplished in its qualities of flexibility and urbanity. It is more responsive to the delicate calls made upon it. We are no longer dependent on the speaker's personality for the full meaning; we receive it from the language itself. We use it for the most delicate ends. It enables us to approach and embrace any subject that lends itself to interpretative and imaginative

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

treatment. We picture the march of events in living colours; we narrate the lives of heroes and working men so that these live again; we precipitate emotions and trace them back to their sources. The consequent benefits of such an instrument are incalculable. It gives us the inestimable power of intercommunication. Example and precept may no longer depend on memory's tablets; they have been indelibly inscribed as literature. Ambitions that we feel, need not be thwarted by the contemplation of the clash of circumstance, because ambitions realized have been recounted in inspiring words. The past is no longer a dead past, but has been recalled from its grave and made to live again. We find joy in looking forward in this pleasure of looking backward. It is this prose that the novelist uses for the purpose of his art.

## *READING NOVELS*

The story-teller is as old as the home. He was as welcome in the halls of the vikings by the Scandinavian fiords and in the tents of the Arab chieftains in the desert, as he is to-day in the ranch of the Texan cattleman or the log-cabin of the Maine woodsman, and as he is to every child that is born of honest and true-hearted parents.

“Tell me a story, please,” says the tired child to its mother; and the child will sit rapt as the tale is unfolded to its beatitude of a climax. Its little heart will beat with excitement of a danger to be overcome, and its tender eyes fill with tears for a trial to be suffered; and what a joy comes to it when it learns that “they were married and lived happily ever after.”

Men and women, grown as we are, we are still Tam Samson’s bairns, and most



## *THE PLEASURE OF*

of us very tired. "Tell us a story," we say to the novelist, "and we will endow you with riches and bless you with thanksgiving. Make us forget our sorrows; lighten our hearts; give us new interests and new meanings for things; brighten our dreams; give us hope; and you shall abide in our midst as one of the great ones." Is it any wonder that so many writers have taken to the telling of tales?

The remarkable fact in modern literature is the growth of the novel. Of all the forms of literary expression, it is the one most practised. Indeed, the most distinguished writers of our time are those who are novelists by profession. It would seem as if the history of the literature of Europe and America of the last half century is a history of the development of the art of story-telling. A

## *READING NOVELS*

roll-call of the great writers of this period would include the names of Thackeray, Dickens, George Meredith, George Eliot, George Sand, Balzac, Victor Hugo, Alexander Dumas, Henri Beyle, Turgéniëff, Tolstoi, Björnson, De Maupassant, Gustave Flaubert, Anatole France, Valdés, Thomas Hardy, Emily and Charlotte Brontë, Robert Louis Stevenson, Henry James, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Conan Doyle, Rudyard Kipling, George Gissing, Henry Seton Merriman, James Lane Allen, Mark Twain, George Du Maurier and Mrs. Humphry Ward. And all these names are become household words. Why is this?

The answer would seem to be that these writers have found the tale to be the one form of literary art which they were certain would appeal; or, at any rate, be

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

read. Speaking in this form they were assured of a hearing. The hearing obtained, the novelist could take a dignified position in the life of the community. He need not wait in depressing indigence or oppressing poverty, as once upon a time writers have been compelled to wait, for a posterity to raise, after they were dead, monuments to their greater glory. They can sit at their ease in comfortable affluence and enjoy the reward of their labours, and taste the fruits of fame while still walking the pleasant places of the good earth. The man of letters is, after all, but a mortal, and the nature of him, as, indeed, of all of us, is to be pleased and encouraged to do better, because of the praise in doing well. He grows in his art, and he also becomes a wiser man, a richer companion, and a riper fellow.

## *READING NOVELS*

He may begin by aiming to live highly, but he will end by living to aim highly. Of course, many writers are tempted by success to assume virtues which they do not possess; but even this has its good side. The habit of assumption must tell in the long run and, if he respect his art, the novelist will remain to pray, even though he came to scoff.

Another answer to the question lies in the fact that the world always has its teachers, preachers, prophets, poets and jesters, who are moved by the natural impulse in them for expression. In times past each of these had his own way of life and his own field of operation. But times have changed, "trade's unfeeling train" has dispossessed them of their heritages. We will no longer be joked at, preached at, or taught with the ferule and fool's-cap. We are still chil-

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

dren, but we can choose now, and we prefer the pleasure-giver to the school-master. We turn our backs on the satirist, and tell him "he is a fool in his folly"; we make ugly faces at the teacher and preacher, because they are so serious they do not know how to play with us; we gaze in ignorant wonder at the poet, understanding little and caring less for what he sings. No, these do not catch us. There was nothing left for the preacher and teacher but to take to the novel; and this is what they have done. They now beguile us with tales while insinuating their lessons. Like the child at its mother's knees, we are taken unawares, caught by the more or less enchanting visions of a fairyland and, before we are aware of it, we have swallowed the moral. I do not say that such novels are distinguished literary achieve-

## READING NOVELS

ments. I am but stating the fact to illustrate the attracting power of a tale well told:

*“ Truth in closest words will fail,  
While Truth embodied in a Tale  
May enter in at lowly doors.”*

The trouble is, this kind of novel threatens to pervert and destroy the art of story-telling. In these days of moralizing and preaching, the novel would appear to be an easy way for anyone cursed with a grievance, or oppressed by the reforming spirit, or afflicted with “an itching leprosy of wit,” to erect his own pulpit from which he may rail at men and women for their bad dispositions and their wicked ways. We ought to mend our ways if only to put a stop to this overflowing stream of moralizing eloquence. And yet, if we did, the enthusiastic and ingenious missionary would

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

probably find some other devil in us that needed exorcising. We may, however, take a large satisfaction in the knowledge that Time's waste-paper basket is ample.

Fiction, said Lord Bacon, "raises the mind by accommodating the images of things to our desires, and not, like history and reason, subjecting the mind to things." If Bacon be right, then have our aforesaid preachers and teachers good authority for using the novel for the moral purpose. We are more moved by our imaginations than we are by our ratiocinative faculties, and if the appeal to reason fail, why should not the appeal be made to the imagination? Even Dickens found this a pleasant way in which to disport his reforming and moralizing spirit. Well, I do not say that a moral purpose is not good; but I

## *READING NOVELS*

do say it is a very bad motive, and not at all conducive to the best art. In the first place, it is inimical to the finer play of the creative power. This should be directed to nothing other than its own fulfilment within the limits of the art. If truth be the novelist's tale, let it appear in the forms of beauty. If we are really anxious for a moral, we shall get it here; for there is no finer moralizer than the pleasure which is experienced in a perfect creation. In the second place a public hungering for moral tales is a public that is oppressed by circumstance and chained to the conditions imposed on it by the struggle for existence. A free people, free in mind as well as body, concerns itself least with considerations about good and bad. Life is too full of joy, and there is delight in living for mere living's sake, and there is no



## THE PLEASURE OF

time for questionings as to their neighbours' conduct, or their own immortal souls. The authors of *Daphnis and Chloe* and *The Golden Ass* knew this high wisdom; and these delightful tales still delight, and will delight the more, as we grow to live in a wise innocence made richer by experience.

Therefore, to point morals at us is to appeal to what is lowest in us and not to what is highest. It is to heap a Pelion of rhetorical derision on an Ossa of the scorn and weight of circumstance. Life, as we live it, is a sufficient castigator without the aid of the schoolmaster's rod or the preacher's whip. What we want is not to be bowed down under the consciousness of our wickedness; but to be uplifted by a realized ideal within us. We want the novel to give us what, perhaps, we are too poor in spirit to find for

## *READING NOVELS*

ourselves; what we have not the time to imagine for ourselves. We want it to tell us of life so that life shall be alluring and not despairing; to make us realize that there is more virtue in being joyous than there is in being fearful and cunning. We want it to embody the best and so to present it that that best shall live in us as our virtues. These given, we shall be helped to a surer hope, a stronger and worthier ambition, a fuller charity, and a wiser innocence in our daily doings. For it is a characteristic of human nature that it grows like unto what it loves.

Finally, a work of art is itself a moral influence, the choicest of moral influences. It is not, of course, a categorical imperative; it is much more, for it is the essential perfume of all imperatives, the atmosphere in which what we call life

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

blossoms and flowers. The sun, we can well imagine, troubles itself not a jot as to whether or no the apple on the tree it warms will be fit to eat. If we dare ascribe a thoughtful purpose to its work of radiation, we should say it was aiming to produce a perfect apple, regardless of what we afterwards did with it. So that the moral of a novel should lie not in any set purpose of the novelist, but in the impression it leaves on our imagination and the use we make of the impression. As with the poet we supplement the tale and complement the teller.

The business of the novelist, therefore, is to tell of life. His success in the telling will depend on the strength of the illusion he creates; and this illusion will bring pleasure and through pleasure any other impulse that is for us fulfilling. He may write of people long ago dead,

## READING NOVELS

or of people now living: the events he narrates may have taken place years ago or are taking place to-day; it matters little so long as the illusion he creates in us is strong enough and direct enough to be acceptable to our imaginations. And this illusion shall be so real that there will be no question as to past or present; it must be now. Thackeray's *Henry Esmond* is a signal example of what I mean. Apart from its admirably achieved eighteenth-century English, which, of course, helps to heighten the illusion, Thackeray conceives and presents his actors in this drama of a past life as if he had personally known them. They are as real to him as the friends he met at his club every day. In the truest sense they must have been, or they would not be real to us. This illusion of reality is so powerfully achieved that

## THE PLEASURE OF

when we have finished reading the story and know that we have been beguiled, the men and women of this imaginary world refuse to leave us. This, of course, is a rare achievement, and stamps the writer as a master in his art. Scott, in *Ivanhoe*, and Hawthorne, in *The Scarlet Letter*, were almost as successful. Charles Reade in *The Cloister and the Hearth*, and Blackmore, in *Lorna Doone*, came very near this high reach. I mention these novels in connection with *Henry Esmond* only to point out the common quality they possess of permanence in their power of illusion.

A writer of a so-called "historical" novel may easily please if he possess but a fair power of narration. The subject-matter and the background are easily obtainable, and he has a large store of heroes to choose from. In read-

## READING NOVELS

ing such a novel we are not a whit fooled; no more than we would be in reading Gibbon or Macaulay or Froude. It is quite another thing, however, to recreate the past and keep it living by the very force of the imaginative impulse. Fine as are *The Cloister and the Hearth* and *Lorna Doone*, they are less creations, in this sense, than splendid narrations in the historian's sense. We do not feel this of *Henry Esmond*, *Ivanhoe* and *The Scarlet Letter*. *Henry Esmond* is far more real to us than either William of Orange or Bolingbroke. What Macaulay could not do Thackeray did. *Esmond* has the quality of being permanent for experience, and the experience is, moreover, delightful.

To make the past live again is a rare achievement; but the novelist is not alone in the possession of this power. Boswell

## THE PLEASURE OF

showed it in his *Life of Doctor Johnson*, and Boswell was not gifted with any undue share of imagination. What helped Boswell, and in the result surprised him, was an abject devotion to his hero; a devotion that made him utterly reckless of himself, if only he could picture his friend as he knew him. This devotion is another quality the novelist must possess if he is to do work that shall abide—and devotion with the novelist spells sincerity. What strikes us most in the writings of the great tale-tellers is their sincerity. Balzac, with all his faults, is so sincere, that we forgive him much for this one quality alone. It is that which makes *Le Père Goriot* the masterpiece it is. It dignifies even the sordid and shabby surroundings of Madame Vauquer's boarding-house. No detail was too insignificant for Balzac;

## *READING NOVELS*

his incomparable power moved everywhere. We are often terribly bored by his minutiae; but we are convinced by his earnestness and faithfulness. His art may be faulty, but his sincerity is always true. Dickens, in spite of his artifices, was sincere. So were Gustave Flaubert, George Eliot, Turgéniéff, Oliver Goldsmith and Daniel De Foe.

Sincerity alone, however, will not avail. Much may be accomplished by an imagination working in sincerity; but the final result will depend on the novelist's temperament and character. This sounds as if I were repeating myself; but I do not intend a repetition. When I speak of the novelist's temperament, I mean his disposition to observe life; the patience to gather details that are so necessary to the production of illusion. And when I say the final test of his art will depend on



## THE PLEASURE OF

character, I refer to that quality in him which stamps his work as individual—not his style altogether, though that is characteristic; nor his treatment, though that, too, is characteristic, but his point of view, his interpretation. It is here that the novelist differs from the poet. The poet's experience is immediate; the novelist's is mediate. The poem is a revelation; the novel is an interpretation. Revelations may be independent of character (the profoundest always are); interpretations are necessarily dependent on character. Émile Zola is in every line of his Rougon-Macquart series of tales; Henri Beyle Stendhal fills *La Chartreuse de Parme* and *Rouge et Noir*; Balzac overflows the *Comédie Humaine*; Thackeray is never absent from *Vanity Fair*; Dickens was acting in almost every story he wrote; Scott fought bat-

## READING NOVELS

bles and chanted war songs through half the *Waverley Novels*; Emily Brontë is really known only in her *Wuthering Heights*.

This that I call character is not injected bodily into the tale; it is what the author cannot help from getting into the tale, and what he cannot keep the tale from giving out. It is the subtle influence that emanates from the total product and impregnates us in some such way as we feel the indefinite sensations stirred in us by summer's lovely dawns or the soft, golden twilights of autumn's evenings, or thunderstorms, or any of nature's arresting processes. It is the author himself reappearing in spiritual form. And on his character will stand or fall the thing he has made.

All these qualities of the writer combine to receive the stuff of life—its in-

## THE PLEASURE OF

cidents, its characters, its environment—into the crucible of his creative imagination, and, by a secret alchemy, of which the novelist himself can give no explanation, produce a thing called the novel—the thing embodied as literature that shall answer to the reality we know as life.

It will be found on reading the best novelists that those who have been men of action rather than onlookers in the game of life, have a more virile style, they give a sense of impressive certainty and speak as if the thing or the incident jumps into its word-symbol. It is a quality which distinguished those Elizabethan writers who were travellers, soldiers and sailors. Bunyan, Fielding and Smollett (in *Roderick Random*) give this sense. I seem to trace De Foe's mastery of imaginative realism to the fact that he had busied himself in the

## *READING NOVELS*

making of pantiles. I am not saying that style depends on an author's working for a living at some trade other than that of writing; but I do say that his having played the game of life in this way tends to enrich his style and give precision to his images. The onlooker, so to speak, will be more or less stiff and artificial. Even Stevenson's writing reads as if it had been very carefully elaborated. Most modern French novelists display this artificiality; and the large majority of living English and American novelists, especially the women-novelists, are amœbic and flabby in their styles. This, however, may be due to their "professionalism." The so-called novelist who "gets up" his subject, and is ever on the lookout for plots, is not creating, he is merely "pot-boiling."

## ***THE PLEASURE OF***

It would appear as if I were writing a treatise on what the late Sir Walter Besant called "The Art of Fiction." That, however, is far from my intention; there are already many estimable works (including one by Sir Walter himself) written by professional gentlemen who are far more intimately acquainted with the methods for "success" in writing fiction than I am. I am trying to say, not how a novel should be written, but how a novel should be understood and appreciated. I am doing this that my readers may realize that the best novels are not to be read merely to pass the time; and that there are novels from which may be derived a pleasure that is energizing and not enervating.

A few years ago it was considered improper to read this form of literature. I have no doubt there is still much justifi-

## READING NOVELS

cation for this attitude—it depends on the reader as well as the writer. People who are shocked at seeing a child rolling over on the floor will not find much in *Tristram Shandy*. They will miss a lot of fun; but then such people do not find the necessity for that savoury; possibly because they are funny in themselves. There are also many homes in which a novel is still forbidden fruit. I am afraid that bar is responsible for many of the so-called moral tales that are being so generously written by those who have “acquired the art of fiction.” Not that the moral tale may not have its rightful place in our scheme of things; but it is not conducive to pleasure. As a consequence we do not breed Fieldings. Our modern novelists have one eye on their royalties and the other on the circulating library and the librarian-oracle; and they

## ***THE PLEASURE OF***

find it more profitable and more reputable to "subject the mind to things" rather than uplift desires and accommodate things to them. If they are really anxious to achieve greatness I would recommend them to read a pleasant and pretty essay on the subject of their art by Mr. Henry James. I promise them a delightful half-hour.

When I speak of the pleasure of reading novels and romances I am not, of course, thinking of the works of the excellent craftsmen to whom I have just referred. I am thinking of those writers for whom expression is an art and a faith, for those master-workers in life's materials who *mean* no more than to produce a self-revealing whole, as perfectly as they can. I am thinking of Cervantes, Fielding, Sterne, Jane Austen, Sir Walter Scott, Thackeray, Dickens,

## *READING NOVELS*

Emily Brontë, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, George Meredith, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry James, Turgéniëff, Balzac, Stendhal, Alexandre Dumas, Victor Hugo, Gustave Flaubert, Guy de Maupassant, Anatole France. Sometimes Robert Louis Stevenson and Anthony Trollope come into view; sometimes James Lane Allen and W. J. Locke; sometimes Charles Reade and William de Morgan; sometimes George Gissing and Henry Seton Merriman. I think of all these for the splendid pleasure they have given me—the pleasure that comes from sheer freedom of the spirit. For it is a mark of genius to sadden the spirit and to uplift the heart at the same time, as I have found in Turgéniëff and Hardy and Thackeray. But in the great wide space of the world, opened up by these interpreters of life



## *THE PLEASURE OF*

and magicians in illusion, there is room for every phase of imaginative exercise.

I think especially of the great humorists; those gifted beings who could touch the very heart of the mystery of life into laughter — Cervantes, Fielding, Sterne, Thackeray and Dickens—the laughter that is also so close to tears, in which Thackeray especially dissolves us. Humour is the rope on which wisdom dances, and wise indeed is he who can balance himself in laughter on the strands of truth. Dickens and Cervantes and Fielding are of the wise men in this respect. Fielding and Dickens are brothers—Englishmen in their natures, their points of view, their sincerity, and in what I may call the non-intellectuality of the basis from which their humour played. Fielding had a larger grasp of character. His creations are types;

## *READING NOVELS*

Dickens's are individuals. Fielding's was a generous, large, and amply fulfilling power; Dickens's power lay in his vivid presentation of a special individual, odd characters, single individualities. He is the perfect showman. The men and women he presents to our eyes are of the common people of the common day, all near to mother earth, and all redolent of the smoke of every-day human strife. Dickens himself was of the common, and I do not say this to his disparagement; rather the contrary. He was true to the truth of his experience, even if that experience was transfigured in the golden light of his imagination. Exaggeration is abundant in him, but its over-indulgence is softened and lost in the richness of his colouring. His humour is not intellectual—humour rarely is intellectual—it belongs to the levels of

## ***THE PLEASURE OF***

experience, and finds its real home in the highways and byways, in the narrow, crowded streets where people jostle each other, rub each other's shoulders, and touch the risibilities to the quick by un-courteous selfishness. The other side of humour is pathos, where laughter melts into tears. This is Dickens's humour as it is Dickens's pathos. Dickens is laughter-moving, and he is also tear-compelling. Like his humour, his pathos is also non-intellectual. It smacks even of vulgarity, so true is it to the common life.

Dickens had been bred in a hard school; his wisdom came from suffering. It is this which tinges so many of his wise words with the dun colours of a London day. But he knows that suffering can be best mitigated by joy, so that a Micawber, a Joe Gargery, a Doctor Mari-gold, a Tom Pinch are blessed with the

## READING NOVELS

gift of humour and the power of smiling through tears.

In reading Dickens don't assume the superior attitude. It is getting to be the fashion to look down on him; it will be to our misfortune if the fashion prevail. But whether he be fashionable or no, he must ever remain the most widely read of English novelists. His appeal is not to any particular age or to any special order of mind; it is to all ages and to the common mind. I can conceive of no time in which the sons and daughters of men and women shall not be crowing and crying at the play of Dickens's great pantomime of life.

If I can say all this of Dickens I should say far more of Henry Fielding, whose *Tom Jones* is one of the master-pieces of English literature. He tells us his book is to treat of "Human Nature,"

## ***THE PLEASURE OF***

and there never was a saner book written in any language. Had Dryden lived to read it he would assuredly have placed it by the side of his Chaucer, and exclaimed, "This, also, is God's Plenty." With all his profound knowledge of men and women and life, and in spite of his hatred of shams, hypocrisy and insincerity, there is such a magnificent magnanimity in Fielding, such a great heart, such a sympathy for human frailties, and such a wise and keen eye. Generations to come of the best minds will drink their most refreshing draughts from this reservoir of wit and humour. Fielding's genius is nearest to Shakespeare's of any writer I know in the English language. If any of my readers, and I doubt not there will be many, have heard that Fielding's *Tom Jones* is an improper book, I shall best answer

## READING NOVELS

them by a quotation from Fielding's farewell to his reader, which may be found in its entirety at the beginning of the eighteenth book of that immortal novel:—

“ And now, my friend, I take this opportunity (as I shall have no other) of heartily wishing thee well. If I have been an entertaining companion to thee, I promise thee it is what I have desired. If in anything I have offended, it was really without any intention. Some things, perhaps, here said, may have hit thee or thy friends; but I do most solemnly declare that they were not pointed at thee or them. I question not but thou hast been told, among other stories of me, that thou wast to travel with a very scurrilous fellow; but whoever told you so did me an injury. No man detests and despises scurrility more than my-

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

self; nor hath any man ever been treated with more.”

To this I would add, in all sincerity, a few lines from William Caxton's preface to Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*:

“And for to pass the time this book shall be pleasant to read in, but for to give faith and belief that all is true that is contained herein, ye be at your liberty; but all is written for our doctrine, and for to beware that we fall not to vice nor sin, but to exercise and follow virtue; by the which we may come and attain to good fame and renown in this life, and after this short and transitory life to come unto everlasting bliss in heaven.”

It is curious that a work like *Tom Jones* should have been followed, in less than a quarter of a century, by such a prose idyll as Goldsmith's *Vicar of*

## READING NOVELS

*Wakefield*. The two are poles apart in every sense, except that both are wonderful realizations of life written by humorists. Such a conjunction of differences but goes to illustrate the richness of the material that lies ready for the novelist's art, and the infinite possibilities of expression.

One can scarcely realize that George Meredith, who is but just dead, wrote contemporaneously with Thackeray and Dickens. What is still more remarkable is the difference in the character of the art that distinguishes Thackeray and Dickens and Meredith—all three humorists—from each other. There is a mid-Victorian flavour in the satirist and comedian, that lingers in spite of their individuality of treatment. In Meredith there is absolutely no trace of a period. He is as fresh and new as the morning's



## THE PLEASURE OF

sunrise; and, though but just passed away, is as ready for judgment as a Greek classic. We need not wait for time to give us our perspective; the qualities in Meredith are the qualities of the greatest masters in art; and his style, which some find irksome, will be found to yield the properties that belong to genius.

Meredith is not the supreme *raconteur* that Alexandre Dumas was; but he has what compels our homage in Dumas, the magical power of illusion. I am not instituting a comparison between the two; no comparison is possible. I am simply ascribing to Meredith the same power that we find at its highest expression in another novelist, whom we distinguish for that power. As a novelist Dumas holds no high place; he was really what may be called a romantic historian; but

## READING NOVELS

he had what no historian has as yet dared to indulge in if he possessed it, for fear of being accused of exaggeration, namely, an astonishing power to make vivid the past. He might be likened to a very clever scene painter who knew how to place his lights so that the moving panorama should show and seem the very march of events in their *mise-en-scène*. Scott had Dumas' power; but he had in addition the novelist's genius for relating incidents and scenery and character to the purpose of the complete novel. In a word, he was an artist as well as a romancer. Dumas was less artist than romancer.

Meredith is an artist to his finger tips. Incident and character and background, so to speak, are seen by him as fluid, each melting into the other, each assisting the other in their contributory flow to the

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

one splendid stream of his novel. He is a great novelist because he is so eminently successful in solidifying, embodying, and shaping all the elements of his ideal world so that they fuse into a whole that appears actual, and real, and living. His men and women do not walk across a room, or hold a conversation, or meet each other anywhere, independent of their surroundings. As he tells it incident and environment become one thing, make one impression—an impression absolutely necessary to the illusion. If he describes a lady's dress, the dress is not objective; it is one of the many subjective experiences of which the novel as a whole is the total unity.

“She wore a dress cunning to embrace the shape and flutter loose about it, in the spirit of a summer's day. Calypso-

## READING NOVELS

clad, Dr. Middleton would have called her. See the silver birch in the breeze; here it swells, there it scatters, and it is puffed to a round, and it streams like a pennon, and now gives the glimpse and shine of the white stem's line within, now hurries over it, denying that it was visible, with a chatter along the sweeping folds, while still the white peeps through. She had the wonderful art of dressing to suit the season and the sky. . . . Millinery would tell us that she wore a fichu of thin white muslin crossed in front on a dress of the same light stuff, trimmed with a deep rose. She carried a grey-silk parasol, traced at the border with green creepers and across the arm devoted to Crossjay, a length of trailing ivy, and in that hand a bunch of the first long grasses. These hues of red rose and green and pale green, ruffled and pouted

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

in the billowy white of the dress ballooning and volleying softly, like a yacht before the sail bends low; but she walked not like one blown against; resembling rather the day of the South-West driving the clouds, gallantly firm in commotion; interfusing colour and varying in the features from laugh to smile and look of settled pleasure, like the heavens above the breeze."

"All this," you say, "to tell merely how a pretty young lady looked when going out for a walk with a boy?" Yes, all this. Why? Because all this is part of the story, and an essential part. Willoughby Patterne must see Clara Middleton thus; at the sight his heart will dissolve into a sea of passionate emotion. You, the reader, must feel as Willoughby Patterne feels, or you will not understand his later agony; and you

## READING NOVELS

must be brought not merely to understand, but literally to live the agony with Willoughby Patterne. That is why all this is necessary. The description is not mere description; it is the object seen in the atmosphere of emotion. If Meredith describes even so unimportant a thing as the hair on the back of the young lady's neck, he dare not "pad." You may be sure there will be no description without the presence of one of the persons of his play who is experiencing the thing described:

"He placed himself at a corner of the doorway for her to pass him into the house, and doated on her cheek, her ear, and the softly dusky nape of her neck, where this way and that the little light-coloured irreclaimable curls running tru-ant from the comb and the knot—curls, half-curls, root-curls, vine-ringlets, wed-

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

ding rings, fledgeling feathers, tufts of down, blown wisps—waved or fell, waved over or up or involutedly, or strayed, loose and downward, in the form of small silken paws, hardly any of them much thicker than a crayon shading, cunninger than long round locks of gold to trick the heart.”

You dare swear that this was just how the lover noted these minute details. Could anything be more exquisitely appealing than this “aside” which comes as a whispered chorus to let us into the secret pulses of the very soul of the lover standing by, and who is himself hardly conscious, but only mistily aware of his own emotional state? This is the work of the consummate artist, who sees values in the most delicate lines, and neglects not even the caress of his brush if he knows that the caress will heighten the

## *READING NOVELS*

effect and assist in the perfection of the impression.

It is this exquisite sense and use of detail that is, probably, the distinguishing mark of Meredith's genius as a novelist. Both his temper and character appear here. That is why we dare not "skip" in reading him; if we do we shall surely miss some vital, revealing phrase—often a word even. Meredith's phrases are packed with attributes, they are full of suggestive power. A living picture may be in a line:

"She seized her anger as if it were a curling snake and cast it off"; "she had at times the look of the nymph that had gazed too long at the faun, and has unwittingly copied his lurking lip and long sliding eye"; "he saw the Goddess Modesty guarding Purity"; "a dainty rogue in porcelain"; "her incandescent



## ***THE PLEASURE OF***

reason"; "she went down stairs like a cascade"; "she was fleet; she ran as though a hundred little feet were bearing her onward smooth as water, so swiftly did the hidden pair multiply one another to speed her . . . her flight wound to an end in a dozen twittering steps, and she sank." Is it any wonder that the boy Crossjay, seeing this fleeting vision, should translate his admiration, as the author tells us he did, "into a dogged frenzy of pursuit"? He would have been deserving of a spanking had he merely looked and not moved.

I am quoting from Meredith's *The Egoist*, the greatest novel in the English language, with its superb mastery of the stuff of life and its consummate art. It is a comedy and a tragedy so interwoven that we cannot say where one begins and the other ends. It is human

## *READING NOVELS*

nature playing the game of life, with none of the "dust of the struggling outer world, no mire, no violent crashes, to make the correctness of the representation convincing." The game played here is that played in the so-called higher social circles, where Meredith tells us, the Comic Spirit has quite a good time of it. But the stage might just as well be the great stage of life itself. Meredith's is no suburban genius. His microcosm instantly spreads itself out to the size of the great globe itself. The gentleman, the student, the scholar, the soldier, the boy, the country dame, the maiden sisters, the lovely heroines of this book are really making believe on the stage of Patterne Hall. The names they are given here are mere marks for identification, so that we may the more easily follow the scenes and acts to the

## THE PLEASURE OF

*dénouement*. In reality the stage is life's stage anywhere on the earth where men and women gather together to live what is called the social life. The specific names of the *dramatis personæ* have but to be thought of in the generic terms I have given, and the book becomes a macrocosm. It is gorgeously amusing, splendidly laughter-moving; and yet we would not be surprised if we saw peeping at us from the side-wings the pained mask of Tragedy. Meredith, of course, would not commit such a *bêtise*; but we do not forget that there is this tragic other-side to this smiling face of Comedy. We experience strange twinges and our smiles suddenly stiffen. A pathos of emotion envelops us, and our laughter disappears into the sterner lines. All this comes from our realization of life under the spell of this arch-

## READING NOVELS

magician. We have been told that the people in "real life" never talk as do the people in George Meredith's books, and that *The Egoist*, in particular, sins in this respect. Surely this is childish petulance. The question is not whether the people of *The Egoist* talk like the people we know in "real life"; the question is do they talk like the people we know in *The Egoist*? When we know the people in *The Egoist* we won't ask the question. It is Meredith's business to raise the mind by accommodating the images of things to our desires, and not to lower the mind by subjecting it to things. And he accomplishes this business superbly.

Meredith's men and women are types, not individuals. Sir Willoughby Patterne, Richard Feverel, Harry Richmond, Tony Gammon, Dr. Middleton,

## ***THE PLEASURE OF***

Vernon Whitford, Clara Middleton, Rhoda Fleming, Lucy Feverel, Lætetia Dale, Janet Ilchester, Diana (wonderful Diana!) of the Crossways, and a host of others, are of the great world of life. We recognize them instantly now that Meredith has recreated them for us. His heroes and heroines are characterized by one supreme quality—the quality of courage. Courage to dare to be one's self in the face of all odds, that was Meredith's medicine for the ills of life. It was his solution of its problem also. Meredith had had to solve that problem for himself, not without great agony of soul. He had known poverty, had experienced sorrows, and had lived and laboured in loneliness and neglect. But courage helped him—courage and the poetic spirit in him. Meredith was a poet, perhaps, more than he was a nov-

## *READING NOVELS*

elist. Life was a revelation to him; he saw it in visions and in relations. The poet in him made him a greater artist as novelist; and this it is, perhaps, which imposes on his readers a harder task in order to receive all the suggestions by which he is trying to reveal what he sees. But then is not that what life itself asks of us? And life imposes this task with but occasional glimpses of joy; Meredith, however, bathes us in the atmosphere of his splendid wisdom and restful humour.

I am afraid I have exceeded the limits of space permitted for this chapter, which has already extended to greater length than I intended; but, indeed, I can but touch the fringes of so magnificent a subject. I have said almost nothing of Cervantes, of Bunyan, of Sterne, of Stendhal, Flaubert, Thomas Hardy

## THE PLEASURE OF

and Henry James. *Don Quixote* might have a book to itself; *The Pilgrim's Progress*, though hardly a novel, is a beautiful expression of an experience of life; and the wit of *Tristram Shandy* is an abiding glory of English literature. All these books are so differently appealing and yet each in its way so graciously pleasure giving. I have but touched on the *Chartreuse de Parme*, that masterly analysis of human love. I have but hinted at the great genius of Turgénieff, that tender spirit of Russia, whose pathos is like a balm or a perfume, and to whom his native land was an inspiration. I might have found space for Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* and spoken of the noble spirit it breathes in spite of its questionable art. I ought to have said a word or two for George Eliot's *Middlemarch* and *The Mill on the Floss*, two

## READING NOVELS

books that may be read again and again. Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*, *The Woodlanders* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* are alone enough to make their writer's fame immortal. And what could I say of Dumas's D'Artagnan stories that has not been better said by the thousands of their readers who have basked in the sunshine of their glorious air? If my readers are curious to know more of him, I recommend them to read Stevenson's essay on Dumas's *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne*, and if they do not take to the Vicomte instantly, then—well, it will be a pity. Flaubert's masterpiece, *Madame Bovary*, and Anthony Trollope's *Barchester* stories, must receive special mention from me, and I must again name Reade's *The Cloister and the Hearth*, that splendid panorama of mediæval days. All these books and



## THE PLEASURE OF

many others whose authors I have but indicated by name, I can only beg my readers to read with the assurance that there are happy hours in store for them in their companionship.

A few words of Nathaniel Hawthorne and *The Scarlet Letter*, and this chapter must end. Hawthorne possessed what few writers possessed in equally high degree, the power to realize an impression of the supernatural by creating its atmosphere without in any other way defining it. His greatest novel, however, is not touched by this atmosphere, it is placed in the open air of Puritan New England. Professor Woodberry has amply dealt with *The Scarlet Letter* in his *Life of Hawthorne*, and my readers will find the chapter devoted to it most instructive reading. Professor Woodberry, however, does not

## *READING NOVELS*

consider this novel as Hawthorne's best, because, in his opinion, it distorts the spiritual life. In Hawthorne's story, he says, "mercy is but a hope," and "evil is presented as a thing without remedy, that cannot change its nature," and because of these faults, as they are deemed, the book is not true to life. I would beg a moment in which to justify Hawthorne. To my mind, it is just because "mercy is but a hope" and "evil is a thing without remedy that cannot change its nature" that Hawthorne in realizing this, saw profoundly into the truth of life. A theory of universal government might fit things more in accordance with our hopes, but Hawthorne was not considering our hopes; he was telling of life. And in life as we live it, the hope for mercy can only be realized, in any true sense of realization, by making of

## THE PLEASURE OF

evil a stepping-stone to good. Virtue means a conquest over evil; and those who attempt the struggle do so because of the demands of their nature. A theory rarely helps us in our tragic moments. We have then to fall back on ourselves, and we are moved by a power as much within us as without us. Our issue from our afflictions depends, in a large measure, on our habits of thought and life, and in the harmony of these with the highest social life. In Hester's life the power without her was greater than the power within her; hence the pitifulness of her story. If Hester's life had been fulfilled of love and not with the spirit of Puritan Christianity, love would have saved her where her creed could not, and Hawthorne's story might never have been written. But Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* must be

## *READING NOVELS*

judged, not from the sectarian's standpoint, but from the standpoint of art. The question is not, does it tally with any creed? The question is, does it succeed in making us realize what Hawthorne attempted? Speaking for myself I must answer with a profound affirmation.

The impression Hawthorne leaves on us is the impression made by all great imaginative writers. The contemplation of creation is always inspiring; the contemplation of art must surely affect us with a sense of grateful humility, if only in the thought that these master-workers have laboured for our sakes; that it was for us they lived strenuous days and walked the rugged steeps of experience. What they gathered in pain they have brought to us for our pleasure. In this largesse the novelist is the most bounteous of givers.



VI

THE PLEASURE OF  
READING HISTORY  
AND BIOGRAPHY



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2

3

4

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6

THE PLEASURE OF READING  
HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY



UR schools of learning do not provide chairs of fiction and biography, and even poetry has been almost overlooked. The reading of novels and biographies is yet free for the pleasure-seeker, and poetry may still continue to flower by the wayside. History, however, has long been received into monastic hospitals, nursed by devout ascetics, and compelled to don the melancholy robes of their order. She now looks sternly and coldly at us from behind barred gates; and woe betide the bold adventurer who dares enter unpermitted and unaccompanied her cloistered walks.



## THE PLEASURE OF

“History is Truth,” exclaim these augurs. Truth must be kept chaste, at any cost, even at the cost of itself, from the polluting touch of the imaginative and impassioned layman. She must be guarded by her high priests and kept sacred, and only visible through iron railings. People have been too familiar with her; they dressed her so that she was quite unlike her real self. It is different now. Now she is the handmaiden of science and philosophy. Well, ye men of science and philosophy, show us Truth as History!

They have responded to the demand and revealed her. There she is, in all her nakedness! Not a sight, I am afraid, to stir the *pia mater* of the true lover who looks long and wonderingly at this starved and bony apparition. “Is this Truth?” he murmurs; “then give me the

## READING HISTORY

other thing. I think she would look more presentable, at least, if she were a little draped." And he turns aside, carefully replacing the hundred and fifty-first volume of the famous History of the World by that eminent scholar of Heidelberg or Bonn or Jena (I forget, for the moment, which), and smilingly takes down Dumas' *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne*.

I suppose it must be the old childish instinct in us that still continues to draw us back from school and permits us but to creep like snails unwillingly to it; but the histories of our pedagogues and professors are, truly, not very attractive. When I come to think on it I believe the child's instinct was right, after all, in turning its head away from the uninviting and unsavoury information offered it as food for its mind. The mental indigestion that invariably followed fully

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

justified its aversion. And we, who are no longer children, surely we waste much precious time in attempting to devour the bulky, spiceless, unripe chunks served up as History. What a time we might be having instead with Homer and Lucian and Shakespeare! This modern worship at the feet of the goddess Fact, is certainly robbing us of our virtues. Already the boy of ten is an expert mathematician and can even calculate his chances on a bet. If you speak to him of George Washington he is ready with dates; if of Benjamin Franklin, he will, probably, quote you the oracles of Poor Richard's Almanack. But ask him, aye, or her, of Achilles or Siegfried, or King Arthur, or Proserpine or Helen of Troy or even of Cinderella, and he will look at you with a wise eye and perhaps tell you, "You're joshing." "What is Hec-

## *READING HISTORY*

uba to him or he to Hecuba," that he should spend an hour with her instead of earning a prize for selling "The Saturday Evening Post"? He is too busy with Fact.

There is, probably, no denying the fact that Julius Cæsar landed in England in the year 55 B.C., or the fact that William of Normandy fought and overcame Harold the Saxon in the year 1066 A. D., but I confess, I never could, and cannot yet, see what of Truth there is in either of these facts. Yet it is not exaggeration to say that history as taught in the schools is little more than tables of such facts, garnished occasionally if you like, but gritty when the teeth get into them. Truth is surely more than Fact! If it were not history as literature would be impossible—and there would, probably, be fewer marriages than there are. To

## ***THE PLEASURE OF***

the lover the truth is not the fact; the truth is in his relation to the woman he loves. In that truth there are infinite possibilities of delightful experiences. In the fact, woman, there is none. The truth of history, likewise, is not in the facts, but in their relations to us; and in those relations there are also infinite possibilities of delightful experiences. It is the business of the historian who is possessed of the facts and who is, presumably, in experiential relation to them, to relate them to us so that we shall have these delightful experiences. Unfortunately, the historian has not often seen his business from that point of view; or else he has not been able to acquit himself as artist; for the result is not a banquet, but a Barmecide feast. The facts of history, as he tells them, look to us somewhat like the imitation candy we

## *READING HISTORY*

often see displayed in shop windows to attract the passer-by. The thing looks like candy, has all the outward seeming of candy, and might even pass for candy were we not moved to taste it. When we do taste it we become disappointingly aware that it is but a piece of wood painted to look like the real thing. The reading of history offers a parallel experience. There is no true pleasure in looking at the thing in the window; the pleasure is in tasting it. There is no real pleasure in reading the histories of the schools; the pleasure comes from living the past over again; and that, unfortunately, is not what we are invited to do.

What historians have been accustomed to do is to lay before us, for our inspection, as it were, all the facts they could vouch for or that they had authority for.

## ***THE PLEASURE OF***

Our schoolmasters are doing exactly the same thing for the children at school. Take any school manual of history and it will be found to consist of a mass of more or less accurate facts arranged in tabulated form—either under the heads of Kings and Queens, or under the captions of presidential administrations. The child is expected to get “chock full” of this science, so-called, and what is worse, to be able “to pass examinations” by displaying a species of mental agility in remembering “the stuff.” What it all *means* the child cannot know, even if the teachers themselves had the ability to tell it—there is no time for that. As to the pleasure to be derived from this study, the less said about it the better; the children’s nightly agonies at home are a sufficient condemnation of the “method.” The writers of these text-

## *READING HISTORY.*

books might answer by saying that the teachers are to blame for their misuse of their manuals which were intended only as notes for the teachers' own more inviting and more interesting explanations; that the teachers' duty is to make the study the delight and the inspiration it ought to be. I reply that teachers, never having experienced the pleasure themselves, would, probably, know nothing about it. And few of them do. History, which is life in story, may be a prose epic; it should be a delight to the young; it should be an inspiration to every child for noble thoughts and noble ambitions; it should sow in him the seeds of a pure love for his native land and stir in him a pride in its citizenship; and it should bring him lovingly near his fellow-men all the world over. When history is written



## ***THE PLEASURE OF***

as it ought to be, teachers in schools will find in them the real matter for countless texts, and then, perhaps, education committees will see the wisdom of giving to history its important place in their schemes of instruction, instead of, as now, relegating it to a subordinate position.

I confess, I prefer Macaulay's *History of England* to Gardiner's *Great Civil War*, even though I am perfectly aware that the facts in Macaulay are not what the professors say they ought to be. I have had many delightful experiences in his account of the Siege of Londonderry, that only a truth-teller like Alexandre Dumas could give me in that moving account of the siege of Belle Isle, in which great-hearted Porthos met his fate like a Titan. In saying this I am not intending any disparagement of Professor

## *READING HISTORY*

Samuel Rawson Gardiner's learning, nor do I wish to question his own personal relation to the truth. His book is the fact-authority on the period. I do not doubt he had himself very many experiences of pleasure from his private relation to Truth. But that only makes me regret all the more that he did not let me share them with him. You seem to be serving an apprenticeship to Gardiner's profound knowledge. With Macaulay, on the other hand, you are journeyman with him on the old roads—master and man working together, eating and drinking together, and fighting and living together. Hang his Whiggish politics! You care not a rap for them, even when he shoves them under your nose. You are too rapt in the enjoyment of marching to the splendid music of his resounding sentences. You rather

## THE PLEASURE OF

enjoy being a Tory, if you are one, and are ready to cry out:

*“ King Charles, and who’ll do him right now?  
King Charles, and who’s ripe for fight now?  
Give a rouse, and here’s in hell’s despite now,  
King Charles! ”*

This is living history; this is what history should compel us to do; the dead past must be resurrected and made to live again in us. “Time,” said Emerson, “dissipates to shining ether the angularity of facts. No anchor, no cable, no fences avail to keep a fact a fact. Babylon and Troy and Tyre, and even early Rome, are passing already into fiction. The Garden of Eden, the Sun standing still in Gibeon, is poetry thenceforward to all mankind. Who cares what the fact was, when we have thus made a constellation of it to hang in heaven an im-

## READING HISTORY

mortal sign?" Our writers of history must take example from Time and dissipate their facts into shining ether; they must help us to hang immortal signs in heaven. Only thus will history repeat itself in our lives with fuller fruitfulness, and so help us to march with the procession erect and debonair.

Of late, however, the splendid possibilities of History as a pleasure-giver have been discovered by a few prose writers of real imaginative power. These have broken ground, so to speak, to the making of open roads where sky may be seen touching the earth. Green's *History of the English People* and McMaster's *History of the People of the United States* have done much to lay out the line of travel. Gregorovius's *History of the City of Rome* is an unusual achievement for a German which should

## THE PLEASURE OF

prove an excellent example for his countrymen to follow. Froude's *History of England* is a master's work, perhaps the best history of the period it deals with in the English language. Froude has been contemptuously spoken of by the professors—a certain sign that the true spirit was in him—but even these are becoming aware that there is more in Froude than they give him credit for. Carlyle, also, came in for a share of professional patronage and academic condescension, if not disdain, and Carlyle's *French Revolution* is a mighty conjurer of the imagination to the free play of the gay spirit; it is better than a cycle of Cathay. Scott's *Tales of a Grandfather* is scorned by our guardians of the goddess History; but I am much mistaken if these same *Tales* have not done far better service for the children of the Gram-

## READING HISTORY

pians and the Lowlands than Buchanan or Robertson or Burton.

Motley's *Dutch Republic*, Prescott's *Conquest of Peru*, his *Conquest of Mexico* and Parkman's historical writings have, none of them, received the affirmative praise of professional approval, yet there are few historical writings in any language that have their power to send the mind disporting in exalting pleasure. Prescott is to be "revised" for his "facts!" Let us hope the reviser will content himself in the modesty of notes and appendices, and not obtrude his pointed features in Prescott's own clothes. We have to thank our stars that Motley's stately and picturesque sentences are still permitted to pleasure us.

The right mind for the writing of history might be somewhat careless of what

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

became of the facts if it would picture the truth; it would be apt to transgress every deep-rooted convention and to break every established law. The conventional historian, bound by rule and careful of tradition, does not realize that the relation of Cromwell's life, for instance, is not completed by the account of his birth, education, incidents dealing with his entrance into national affairs, and the many other facts which are detailed in manuals. All these things together do not make up the Cromwell who lived and subverted a kingdom and converted a people. There is a Cromwell in history who was all these and something more—a radiating and energizing spirit—that is the Cromwell we want to know, because that Cromwell will be alive for us. But that Cromwell we do not get. Every fact that was related to him and

## *READING HISTORY*

to which he was related is given so much prominence (as if the facts could explain the man) that the man himself is lost in the mass of the lifeless rubbish; for rubbish it is, if it hampers the man's movements on the pictured pages of his "life." If facts are to be insisted on, let them be revealed in the influences they had on his conduct, his thought, his spoken words, his living relation with the men of his time; do not weigh him down with their apparel. Perhaps Froude was right, and what I am asking for is beyond the scope of the historian's art, is outside the field of prose, and belongs properly to poetry. If this be so, then is there no real pleasure to be obtained from the reading of history—nothing but a casual interest from a more or less well-strung catalogue of names, dates, events, more or less important and use-



## *THE PLEASURE OF*

ful. But I am not quite convinced of Froude's opinion:—

“We compare,” he says, “the man as the historian represents him with the track of his path through the world. The work is the work of a giant; the man, stripped of the vulgar appendages with which the stunted imagination of his biographer may have set him off, is full of meannesses and littlenesses, and is scarcely greater than one of ourselves. Prose, that is, has attempted something to which it is not equal. It describes a figure which it calls Cæsar; but it is not Cæsar, it is a monster. For the same reason, prose fictions, novels and the like, are worthless for more than a momentary purpose. The life which they are able to represent is not worth representing. There is no person so poor in his own eyes as not to gaze with pleasure in a

## *READING HISTORY*

looking-glass; and the prose age may value its own image in the novel. But the value of all such representations is ephemeral. It is with the poet's art as with the sculptor's—sandstone will not carve like marble, its texture is too loose to retain a sharply moulded outline. The actions of men, if they are true, noble, and genuine, are strong enough to bear the form and bear the polish of verse; if loose or feeble, they crumble away into the softer undulations of prose."

Excellently well put; and yet I feel as if Froude had allowed himself to be carried away by his metaphor. The language the poet uses is the same language the historian employs; it is the one medium in which both work. It depends on something which is not in the medium whether it shall carve like marble or

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

crumble away like sandstone. These qualities are not in the nature of language; they appear in the use made of language; they depend on the quality of the writer's creative imagination, and on the degree of his power to embody it in his medium. The fault is not with the prose; the fault is in the historian with his "stunted imagination." The writer with the imagination and the power does not complain of his medium; indeed, it is a large part of his pleasure to compel his medium to yield to the demands he makes on it in order that it should shape itself to his ideal images. I might quote Froude himself against himself by citing his beautiful essay on "England's Forgotten Worthies," or his fine picture of Alexander of Abonotichus, or his masterly studies of Erasmus and Cæsar.

To say that novelists are worthless for

## READING HISTORY

more than a momentary purpose is to forget De Foe's *History of the Plague*, his *History of the Great Fire*, Fielding's *Tom Jones* and Thackeray's *Esmond*. Had Froude been aware when he wrote his essay on Homer, from which I have quoted, of Pater's *Marius the Epicurean*, George Meredith's *The Egoist* and *Harry Richmond* and Charles Reade's *The Cloister and the Hearth*, I am sure he would have hesitated to estimate the novel so lowly. I cannot well conceive a poet satisfying me more amply of his heroes than these prose writers have succeeded in doing for theirs.

Facts! There are more facts now at the disposal of the historian than he knows what to do with. There are more facts in archives and repositories about Oliver Cromwell than Walter Pater possessed for his *Marius*. And yet *Marius*, who

## ***THE PLEASURE OF***

may have lived a millennium before Cromwell, is a living man to the reader; whereas no historian who has subjected Cromwell to the heroic treatment, has so far succeeded in making him live as the novelist makes Marius live. Even in Carlyle's stupendous story Cromwell has not that abiding living value to us that Marius has. What has any historian done for Alexander the Great, Julius Cæsar or Napoleon, that Dumas did for D'Artagnan? Does Erasmus stand out in history as his father does in Charles Reade's romance? Is Mark Antony as real to us in any history of Rome as Meredith has made real Roy Richmond? It is not to the point to say that Marius and D'Artagnan and Gerard and Roy Richmond never really lived and are but creatures of the novelist's imagination. What more are Alexander the Great,

## READING HISTORY

Julius Cæsar, Erasmus of Rotterdam, and Mark Antony, to any historian? Does he know anything more of them than what his imagination tells him? Legend and story and document and painted likeness are, when all is said and done, but hints and helps to the better realization of the man; they are not the man. If anything, these should advantage the historian and enable him to reach a higher degree of excellence. The trouble with the historian is, not that his prose is sandstone, but that he has no vitalizing imagination. A great man greatly conceived will live in prose that will carve like marble, as he lives in poetry, if his creator can use his medium. What the historian shall do is to imagine him greatly, conceive him greatly, and realize him greatly.

The historian, probably, is not alto-

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

gether to blame; for he is but following the traditions. What would be said of him were he to make of the Duc de Lauzun what Dumas made of D'Artagnan, even could he afford the necessary space? Did the historian dare to write history after such a fashion, or after the fashion of Thackeray with Esmond or Scott with Rob Roy and Nigel, I venture to assert that he would be overwhelmed with derision and obloquy. He would be told that his imagination had got the better of his judgment; that he had no sense of proportion, and that he had degraded history to the level of fiction. Froude himself passed through such an experience; even Green is being looked at askance for his patriotic enthusiasm, and Herodotus, of course, has always been smiled at condescendingly. The historical manner and method are not

## READING HISTORY.

conducive to pleasure; that would seem to be the conclusion of the matter. Yet I cannot help believing that were an Antony to rise up with the spirit of a Brutus in him he would make Cæsar live again.

*“ There is no great and no small,  
To the Soul that maketh all;  
And where it cometh all things are;  
And it cometh everywhere.*

*“ I am owner of the sphere,  
Of the seven stars and the solar year,  
Of Cæsar’s hand, and Plato’s brain,  
Of Lord Christ’s heart and Shakespeare’s  
strain.”*

Our classic historians were not creative artists; they did not conceive their art from the artist’s point of view. They mastered and marshalled the facts of the past; gave them colour and dignity and the pomp of glorious circumstance, and marched them past us like some magnificent pageant. Looking on at this splen-



## THE PLEASURE OF

did show there is a pleasure to be experienced. It is not the highest form of pleasure; but it is worth having, even at the price we have to pay for it. Gibbon's supreme mastery over his facts, and his splendid ability to order and arrange them to advantage are very impressive in the dignified sentences of *The Roman Empire*. There is pleasure here, though I should hesitate to urge the reading of this work for the sake of the pleasure. I would say, rather, that it was a duty to read it. I would say the same of Thucydides, Livy, Grote's *History of Greece* and Mommsen's *History of Rome*. And I would say it was neither a pleasure nor a duty to read Hume and Smollett's *History of England*, or Robertson's *History of Scotland*, or Josephus' *History of the Jews*, or Guicciardini's *History of Italy*, or

## READING HISTORY

*Alison's History of Europe*, or *Burnet's History of the Reformation*. I would suggest that these meritorious and useful compendiums be permitted to occupy dignified seats in public institutions where, occasionally, they could be appealed to for judgment.

To come to the bed-rock of the matter, history has value and meaning only, or very largely, in so far as it is biography. It is the life lived that counts, that brings the response from us, and that sets the old, dead world dancing again. There is much in Carlyle's "heroes"; for in our realization of them we get an insight into the people and the events that precipitated them. The English Revolution centres in Hampden and Pym and Cromwell; the American Civil War revolves around Abraham Lincoln; the French Revolution surges and boils about Mira-

## THE PLEASURE OF

beau, Danton, Robespierre and the rest; Frederick the Great and Gustavus Adolphus gather the clouds of their age like mountains; Cæsar and Hannibal, Cyrus and Alexander, Moses and Mahomet focus in themselves the triumphal marches of nations. Paul and Savonarola and Luther and Loyola and Wesley are the people's pilots over the great ocean of thought. The writers who could realize for us these men would be the true historians. Cellini in his *Autobiography* has told us more of Florence and the life of his day than we could get from any history. The pulsating heart of the city is in the book—all its mighty impulses and all its passion. And what an inspiration may come from Plutarch's *Lives!* History may enlarge our horizon of the laws of the universe, but it narrows our ideas of the individual.

## READING BIOGRAPHY

Biography in magnifying the individual to the heroic size "hitches him to a star," and the life-point spreads circles into infinity. It would seem as if the histories of peoples were the biographies of its heroes, so tremendous are the powers of nature when concentrated in one great mind. A nation is latent in a man. What was doing in America on the eve of Abraham Lincoln's appearance on the scene? A meaningless vortex of mighty forces pushing and straining and swirling in a seeming gigantic whirlpool. Then Lincoln comes, and immediately the line of direction is laid down, the channel formed, and the great cataract sweeps over the precipice to resume its placid course, a highway of progress, toward the ocean of life.

I would ask, nay beg, my readers to take up Richard Hakluyt's *Voyages and*

## **THE PLEASURE OF**

*Travels*—"travails," Hakluyt writes the word, and it is the more significant of the two to us to-day—a most heartening and uplifting piece of literature and a glory to the devotional spirit of its compiler. Read there what England's sailors did in the reign of good Queen Bess. You will realize the meaning of history then, in the lives of the brave-spirited and stout-hearted adventurers who laid the foundations of England's later greater empire. And read also Froude's beautiful essay on "England's Forgotten Worthies" as an introduction to Hakluyt.

"Those five volumes" (Froude is referring to the edition of Hakluyt published in 1811) "may be called the Prose Epic of the modern English nation. They contain the heroic tales of the exploits of the great men in whom the new

## **READING BIOGRAPHY**

era was inaugurated; not mythic, like the Iliads and the Eddas, but plain, broad narratives of substantial facts, which rival legend in interest and grandeur. What the old epics were to the royally and nobly born, this modern epic is to the common people. We have no longer kings or princes for chief actors, to whom the heroism like the dominion of the world had in time past been confined. But, as it was in the days of the Apostles, when a few poor fishermen from an obscure lake in Palestine assumed, under the Divine mission, the spiritual authority over mankind, so, in the days of our own Elizabeth, the seamen from the banks of the Thames, and the Avon, the Plym and the Dart, self-taught and self-directed, with no impulse but what was beating in their own royal hearts, went out across the unknown seas fighting,

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

discovering, colonizing, and graved out the channels, paving them at last with their bones, through which the commerce and enterprise of England has flowed out over all the world. We can conceive nothing, not the songs of Homer himself, which would be read among us with more enthusiastic interest than these plain massive tales; and a people's edition of them in days when the writings of Ainsworth and Eugène Sue circulate in tens of thousands, would perhaps be the most blessed antidote which could be bestowed upon us. The heroes themselves were the men of the people—the Joneses, the Smiths, the Drakes, the Davises; and no courtly pen, with the one exception of Raleigh, lent its polish or its varnish to set them off. In most cases the captain himself, or his clerk or servant, or some unknown gentleman

## *READING BIOGRAPHY*

volunteer sat down and chronicled the voyage which he had shared, and thus inorganically arose a collection of writings which, with all their simplicity, are for no thing more striking than for the high moral beauty, warmed with natural feeling, which displays itself through all their pages. With us, the sailor is scarcely himself beyond his quarter-deck. If he is distinguished in his profession, he is professional merely; or if he is more than that, he owes it not to his work as a sailor, but to independent domestic culture. With them, their profession was the school of their nature, a high moral education which most brought out what was most nobly human in them; and the wonders of earth, and air, and sea, and sky, were a real intelligible language in which they heard Almighty God speaking to them."



## ***THE PLEASURE OF***

This is what the Bible did for the early Christian adventurers who came after Paul, and what it still means to those who are moved to-day to carry the torch of truth and the gracious benignancy of its kindly light to the uttermost corners of the earth. This is how Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* inspired the Greeks to living heroic lives and doing great deeds; this is why minstrels sang the Song of Roland and the Sagas on the eve of battles. Example is more potent than precept, and what man has once dared man may again dare. It is in biography that history reveals its true philosophy—the philosophy that consists, not in a formulation of laws which govern the rise and fall of nations, nor yet in the classification of the forces which precipitate species out of their genera, but the philosophy that is a revelation of man's spirit and its

## *READING BIOGRAPHY*

energizing activity to its highest assertion and fulfilment.

Compared with Biography, History is dust; Biography is the living clay. "What to me is this quintessence of dust?" Show us living men who have highly resolved and highly achieved; men who dared anything, even to the unbinding of "the cluster of the Pleiades." It matters not if they failed. What does matter is that they dared. Davis, Frobisher, Parry, Franklin, McClintock, Baffin, Scott, Nansen, are names that ring again of the joy of daring, in spite of their failures to attain their goal; and Peary, with his final success, remains the indomitable voyager of earlier years. Sir Richard Grenville, in that last fight of the good ship "Revenge," at Flores, left a name behind him that is a trumpet-blast calling to

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

honour. He and his hundred men and his little forty-ton frigate fought, for a day and a night, against fifty-three Spanish ships of war manned with ten thousand men, such a fight as not even the pass of Thermopylæ witnessed. For fifteen hours they withstood the attack, sinking two galleons and killing fifteen hundred men. Finally, with powder spent, pikes broken and eight hundred cannon balls riddled in the hull, and the "Revenge" sinking like a sieve, Sir Richard ordered his master-gunner to scuttle her, so that the Spaniards might not boast of her capture. The man that could die like Grenville is a man worth knowing. Read of him in Hakluyt, in Sir Walter Raleigh's beautiful and simple narrative and John Higgins's plain and touching prose, and the heart in you must swell in a joyful and tearful pride

## *READING BIOGRAPHY*

in this great soul, whose last dying words have been lovingly preserved for us: "Here die I, Richard Grenville, with a joyful and quiet mind, for that I have ended my life as a true soldier ought to do, that hath fought for his country, queen, religion, and honour. Whereby my soul most joyfully departeth out of this body, and shall always leave behind it an everlasting fame of a valiant and true soldier that hath done his duty as he was bound to do."

Is it any wonder that a Blake and a Collingwood and a Nelson and a Farragut should follow him? We stand bowed in profound and humble reverence before such an embodiment of the human spirit. Surely, this soul sprang from something other than a mere harmonious correlation of atoms! We require no philosophy to explain to us this

## ***THE PLEASURE OF***

valiant and true soldier; he asks for no explanation; he is as inevitable as the ocean he sailed on, and as fulfilling.

To read of heroic deeds done in the name of honour, or of religion, or of love, or of country, or of any ideal, must always be profoundly moving. It should be a matter for gladness and hope that so many heroes have been made immortal for us in story. Literature shines with the glory reflected from them, and biography specially. Buddha and Christ, Savonarola and Luther; Bruno and Copernicus, Columbus and Henry Hudson, Grenville and Nelson, Shakespeare and Wordsworth, Erasmus and Knox, Newton and Charles Darwin, Socrates and Plato, George Fox and John Wesley, Livingstone and Cook, William Pitt and Abraham Lincoln, and all the others among the host of noble martyrs and

## READING BIOGRAPHY

noble workers who contributed to the happiness and the liberty we enjoy to-day, all these have received devoted attention from poets and lovers. Any biography, however crudely written, of these men must delight us—their lives are in themselves inspirations to their writers.

Let me recommend Mr. Fielding Hall's *The Soul of a People* for the life-story of Prince Theiddatha the Buddha, "he who pointed out the way to those that had lost it," the Newton of the spiritual world, Mr. Hall calls him, "the man who drew men to him by love and held them so forever." Read the *New Testament* again and again and fill yourself with the perfume of Christ's great heart. Plato himself is Socrates' best biographer; read especially the *Apology* in Jowett's fine translation, and also the *Phædo* and the *Crito*. Luther and Eras-

## THE PLEASURE OF

mus and Cæsar have been splendidly realized for us by Froude; the first in an essay in his *Short Studies on Great Subjects*, and the other two in separate books. It is remarkable that Froude's book on Cæsar is the only attempt to deal adequately with this extraordinary man. George Fox's *Journals* is a masterpiece of direct and simple English; the fine-souled Quaker is a heartening friend. Carlyle has written an essay on John Knox which must not be forgotten. Robert Southey's *Life of Nelson* has deservedly passed into a classic. Lord Rosebery's *Pitt* is the best summary of the great statesman's life in the language. I regret I know of no life of Abraham Lincoln I can recommend as distinguished; the book has yet to be written that shall be worthy of this wonderful man who, in his spirit and character, was

## READING BIOGRAPHY

brother to the few great select of this world's heroes.

In the English language there exist three biographies that stand out, head and shoulders, above all the rest. I refer to Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson*, Trevelyan's *Life and Letters of Macaulay* and Lockhart's *Life of Scott*. Boswell's book is a signal instance of what literature can do for a personality. Had it not been for Boswell we should never have realized the manliness, the piety, the wise simplicity, the excelling uprightness of a character that now commands our delight and our homage. And what a piece of picturesque realism it is of the literary life of the time! Burke and Garrick, Gibbon and Goldsmith, Reynolds and Langton and Beauclerk, all live again in these faithful pages; and in their midst stalks and rolls the dusty



## ***THE PLEASURE OF***

brown figure of Johnson himself—the Great Cham of literature, Smollett called him. Trevelyan's life of his uncle and Lockhart's life of Scott are both splendid monuments to two noble lives. So much has been written about these three books that it is unnecessary for me to add more. They should form a part of the library of the poorest home. With Boswell I should advise the reading of Forster's *Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith*, a book that deserves a wider recognition than it is receiving. There is no other life of this kindly Irish and humanly vain traveller on life's way that is comparable to it. Goldsmith was a hero in Forster's eyes; the enthusiasm and love for the hero have combined to give us a book that is as readable as a romance and as absorbing as some of the best romances.

## READING BIOGRAPHY

Gibbon's *Autobiography* is, unfortunately, a fragment, but it must be read, fragment as it is. Walton's *Lives* is a delight at any time. In their admirable simplicity of style and loving treatment of Donne, Wotton, Hooker, Herbert and Sanderson, they appeal to our best emotions. They should be read if only to know Walton himself, whose own sweet nature peeps out of every line of his writing.

Carlyle's *Life and Letters of Oliver Cromwell* is the one book on this man that counts. It is the only book that has in any way realized the great Englishman and set him before the eyes of the world as the man he really was—a stupendous individual force in a nation's history, a later Richard Grenville.

Thousands of "lives" have been written of Napoleon, but I can speak of

## THE PLEASURE OF

actual acquaintance with only a few. From what I have read and from what I learn from the judgments of others whose opinions are of value, I should say that "the real life" of this remarkable phenomenon has yet to be written. If a working knowledge of the facts and events of Napoleon's career be desired, there is no more informing book than Rose's *Life of Napoleon I*. Napoleon's secretaries, some of his marshals, friends, mistresses, retainers and hangers-on at his court have contributed their "mémoires" and "souvenirs" of gossip and opinions, and those who are interested in gossip will find enough to amuse them for years to come. Bourrienne's *Life of Napoleon* is valuable for its record of Napoleon's own words, and what Napoleon had to say of himself or of anybody is worth reading.

## READING BIOGRAPHY

Pepys's *Diary* is not a biography, but it is a man and his times. Read it; it is a feast of delight and a stream of living pleasure. Lamb's *Essays of Elia* are not biography, but they are filled with Charles Lamb, and wherever he is there is joy. Lamb could not help putting himself in his writings; let us thank the gods there be for his failing—he has made of it an exquisite virtue. Montaigne's *Essays* are not biography; but they are the man, nevertheless, and where this man is there are humour and pathos, wisdom and kindness of heart, graciousness of mind and richness of knowledge of life. I will take leave to quote what he himself has written of his essays:—

“ I erect not here a statue to be set up in the market-place of a town, or in a church, or in any other public place. It

## *THE PLEASURE OF*

is for the corner of a library, or to amuse a neighbour, or a friend of mine withal, who by this image may haply take pleasure to renew acquaintance, and to re-converse with me. Others have been emboldened to speak of themselves, because they have found worthy and rich subject in themselves. I, contrariwise, because I have found mine so barren, and so shallow, that it cannot admit suspicion of ostentation. I find not so much good in myself, but I may speak of it without blushing. . . . And if it happen no man read me, have I lost my time, to have entertained myself so many idle hours, about so pleasing and profitable thoughts? In framing this portrait of myself, I have so often been fain to frizzle and trim me, that so I might the better extract myself, and the pattern is thereby confirmed, and in some sort

## READING BIOGRAPHY

pruned. Drawing myself for others, I have drawn myself with pure and better colours than were my first. I have no more made my book than my book hath made me: a book consubstantial with its author: of a peculiar and fit occupation. A member of my life; not of an occupation and end strange and foreign, as all other books. Have I mis-spent my time, to have taken an account of myself so continually and so curiously?"

The world long since answered his question, and the world would rather lose the records of a nation than lose this autobiography of Montaigne. "Je suis moi-même la matière de mon livre," he said, and that is what makes his book the enduring living thing it is. It is what draws us often to Sir Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici*, and, at other times, to Amiel's *Journal Intime*, and

## THE PLEASURE OF

at odd times to the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, and at most times to George Borrow's *Lavengro* and his *Romany Rye*. What we can understand and love and feel in our hearts, that is what appeals to us. The life lived, whether in the spirit or in the body or in the spirit and the body together, that is what catches us and lifts us and sends us travelling with light steps, singing carols along the way of our earthly pilgrimage. "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked with us by the way?"

Every story rightly told, every biography truly realized, is a friend walking with us and talking with us by the way; a friend telling us of trials suffered or of trials overcome, of joy lived and of joy given, of pleasure felt and of happiness achieved. And in the telling he

## READING BIOGRAPHY.

bids us take heart and be of good courage, for there is a way to happiness through all our afflictions. Sir Thomas Browne put it in his way, in his prayer at the conclusion of his *Religio Medici*, and it is not a bad way:

“Bless me in this life with but the peace of my conscience, command of my affections, the love of Thyself, and my dearest friends, and I shall be happy enough to pity Cæsar!” George Borrow advised us to “Fear God, and take your own part,” and there is much to be said for this advice also. Samuel Johnson hoped he had attained nearer to virtue through submission to God and benevolence to man, and who shall say that this is not a high hope and a noble method?

It is a great deal easier to go down hill than up. We can slip down by our-



## *THE PLEASURE OF.*

selves; but to go up is hard. We want the helping example, even the strongest of us; we want the cheering word, the comforting laugh, the glad hand. All these are offered us in literature—in the books I have been writing about. Read them for this pleasure I have tried to describe. Permit yourself to be open to their influence, and they will abide with you always. Even if, in time, you forget particular features, the memory of their companionship will always remain, ready to thrill you again at every touch of friendship or any play of fate. The seasons of the year will recall them to you in delightful surprises, and the very air will murmur of their invisible presences. And you, yourself, if you do not rest content in your own pleasure, may become a radiating centre of pleasure in the circle of your own home. Your

## *READING BIOGRAPHY*

books are your best friends; do not keep them to yourself; be proud of them. "Of what shall a man be proud," asked Stevenson, "if he is not proud of his friends?"



# **LIST OF BOOKS**

## LIST OF BOOKS

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### LITERARY STUDY OF THE BIBLE. By Richard G. Moulton.

Professor Moulton's book is unquestionably the best book in the language for the literary study of the Bible. I cannot recommend it too highly. In *The Modern Reader's Bible* will be found notes, and historical and literary introductions, which the student will do well to read. Professor Moulton has also issued a *Short Introduction to the Literature of the Bible*. The essential matter of both these books, however, will be found contained in the appendices to his *The Modern Reader's Bible* (one vol. edit.).

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Stanley's work is not now considered the most authoritative, since it does not include the results of the latest researches; but it is, nevertheless, a delightful book, and is written in a captivating style. His shortcomings could easily be supplemented from Hastings' *Bible Dictionary*.

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# INDEX





## INDEX

- ACTING**, compared with the art of poetry, 158; advantage possessed by audiences in Shakespeare's time, 159
- ACTOR**, the art of the, 157, 158
- ACTORS**, in Elizabethan days, 152-53
- ÆSCHYLUS**, his genius, 115-116; Symonds's study of, 116; his divine madness, 137
- ALEXANDER the Great**, 280, 286
- ALISON**, *History of Europe*, 285
- AMERICA**, its foundation due to the Bible, 49-50
- AMERICAN Civil War**, 285; Lincoln's position in, 287
- AMIEL**, his *Journal Intime*, 305
- ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA**, quoted to show Shakespeare's love for women, 174
- ARISTOPHANES**, his genius, 117; Symonds's study of, 117-118; his comic spirit, 118-119; his treatment of Athens, 119-120; "The Knights," 120; "The Clouds," 120; "The Wasps," 120; "The Frogs," 120; "Lysistrata," 120
- ART**. Good art is itself a moral influence, 215
- AS YOU LIKE IT**. Quoted to show Shakespeare as the poet of love, 173
- BACON (Lord)**, on the novel, 210
- BALZAC (H. de)**, "Père Goriot," 15, 218; his character in his *Comédie Humaine*, 220.
- BARCHESTER STORIES**. Trollope's novels, 251
- BESANT**, Sir W., on the art of writing fiction, 224
- BIBLE**, The, what it is, 33, 35
- BIBLE**, the pleasure of reading the, 33-79

## INDEX

- BIBLE, The.** Why it should be read, 36; what its translation into English did, 36; its music, 39; ministers of religion should be taught how to read, 41; loss of its pleasure, 51; the spirit of beauty in, 51; the Jew's reading of, 52; how it is taught in schools, 53; its devotional poetry, 56; its reading must not be compulsory, 57; its lyrical poetry, 57-59; arranged by Prof. Moulton, 60; its optimism, 72; its secret, 72; its value as literature, 77; how to appreciate it, 78; its writers also novelists, 197; its influence as biography, 292
- BIOGRAPHY, no chairs of,** in universities, 259; compared with history, 287, 293; history's true philosophy, 292; the record of noble deeds, 295-96; every good biography is a friend walking by the way, 306
- BLAKE (W.),** "The Cradle Song," 134-35; "Love's Secret," 135; the effect of his poetry, 136; his divine madness, 137
- BOCCACCIO,** 124
- BOOK, test of a real,** 17
- "BOOKS in Books' Clothing,"** 18
- BOOKS, good,** 19-20; worth reading, 22-25; world of, 25; what they can do for us, 25-27; companions and friends, 29-30; the pleasure and the value of, 308-9
- BOOKS, Lamb on,** 12-14
- BORROW (George),** his way to happiness, 307; his *Lavengro* and *Romany Rye*, 306
- BOSWELL (J.),** Life of Johnson, 218, 299-300
- BOURRIENNE,** his *Life of Napoleon*, 302
- BRONTË (Emily),** her character in *Wuthering Heights*, 221
- BROWNE (Sir T.),** his *Religio Medici*, 305; his way to happiness, 307
- BROWNING (Robert),** his

## INDEX

- faith biblical, 73; on Dante, 124
- BUDDHA**, the life of, 297
- BUNYAN** (John), 222; *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 250
- BURNET**, *History of the Reformation*, 285
- BURNS**, "The Jolly Beggars," 56; "Ye Banks and Braes o' Bonnie Doon," 138; "Highland Mary," 138; "Tam o' Shanter," 138; "The Jolly Beggars," 138
- BUTCHER, LANG & MYERS**, their prose version of Homer's "Iliad," 114
- CÆSAR** (Julius), 280, 286; life by Froude, 298
- CARLYLE** (Thomas); *History of the French Revolution*, 272; his "heroes," 285; his essay on John Knox, 298; his *Life and Letters of Oliver Cromwell*, 301
- CAXTON** (W.), his preface to Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*, 234
- CELLINI** (Benvenuto), his *Autobiography*, 286
- CERVANTES** (M. de), *Don Quixote*, 250
- CHARACTER**, what it is in the novelist, 221
- CHARTREUSE DE PARME, LA**, 220, 250
- CHAUCER** (Geoffrey), his character and life, 124-126; his love of books and nature, 127; "The Canterbury Tales," 128; "The House of Fame," 128; "The Legend of Good Women," 128; character of his poetry, 128; Dryden on, 128; his influence on the English language, 129; "The Good Counsel," 129-130; a tale-teller, 197-98
- CHRIST**, as revealed in the New Testament, 297
- CICERO**, 121
- CLASSIC**, A, 24
- CLOISTER AND THE HEARTH**, the, 216, 217, 251
- COLERIDGE** (S. T.), his work on Shakespeare, 144
- COMÉDIE HUMAINE**, 220
- "COMING of Evil Days,"

## INDEX

- lyric in "Ecclesiastes," 69-71
- CORINTHIANS, Epistle to, 73-76
- COWLEY (A.), on books, 30
- CROMWELL (Oliver), 274; Carlyle's Life of, 279-80, 285, 301
- CYMBELINE. Quoted to show Shakespeare's love for women, 174
- CYRUS, 286
- DANTON, 286
- DANTE, his poetry, 122-23; his temper, 123; Browning on, 124
- DAPHNIS and Chloe, 212
- DAVID and Jonathan, 15
- DE FOE (Daniel), a founder of English prose, 200; his sincerity, 219; his realism, 222-23
- DERBY (Lord), his verse translation of Homer's "Iliad," 114
- DICKENS (Charles), "Great Expectations," 15; his moralizing, 210; his sincerity, 219; acting in his stories, 220; the quality of his power as a novelist, 229-231
- DON QUIXOTE, 250
- DRYDEN (John), on Chaucer, 128
- DUMAS, his D'Artagnan Tales, 251; as *raconteur*, 236-37
- ECCLESIASTICUS, Book of, 67, 69-72
- EGOIST, The, its beauties, 238-45, 247
- ELIOT (George), her sincerity, 219; her *Middlemarch*, 250; her *Mill on the Floss*, 200-1
- EMERSON (R. W.), his view of history, 270-71; on history, 283
- ENGLAND, greatness of, due to the Bible, 49
- ENGLISH Revolution, 285
- ERASMUS, 280; life by Froude, 298
- FACT, the goddess of history, 262; the chief ingredient of history, 263; the historian's relation to, 264-67
- FACTS of little value in true history, 274-75
- FAITH, greater than wisdom, 63
- FICTION, current, 16, 17;

## INDEX

- professionalism in, 223;  
art of writing, 224;  
what people miss in not  
reading, 225; no chairs  
of, in universities, 259
- FIELDING (Henry), 222;  
his power as a novelist,  
229, 231-234
- FLAUBERT (Gustave), his  
sincerity, 219; his *Mad-  
ame Bovary*, 251
- FORSTER (J.), his *Life and  
Adventures of Oliver  
Goldsmith*, 300
- FOX (George), his *Jour-  
nals*, 298
- FRANCE (Anatole), his  
prose, 201
- FRENCH NOVELISTS, the  
modern, 223
- FRIENDSHIP, essay on, from  
"Ecclesiasticus," 67-69
- FROUDE (J. A.), 217; *His-  
tory of England*, 272; on  
the historian's art, 275-  
77; criticism on, 277-81;  
criticized as historian,  
282; his essay on "Eng-  
land's Forgotten Worth-  
ies," 288; on Hakluyt's  
*Voyages*, 288-291; his  
*Short Studies on Great  
Subjects*, 298; his books  
on Erasmus and Cæsar,  
298
- FREDERICK the Great, 286.
- FRENCH Revolution, 285-86
- GARDINER (S. R.), his  
*History of the Great  
Civil War*, 268-269
- GENESIS, the story of the  
creation in, 41-42
- GIBBON, 217; *The Roman  
Empire*, 284; his *Auto-  
biography*, 301
- GOETHE (J. W. von), his  
"Faust," 15.
- GOLDEN ASS, The, 212
- GOLDSMITH (O.), a foun-  
der of English prose,  
200; his sincerity, 219;  
Forster's Life of, 300.
- GREECE, its influence, 111
- GREEKS, the, as described  
by Homer, 109-110
- GREEN (J. R.), *History of  
the English People*, 271;  
criticized as historian,  
282
- GREGOROVIVS (F.), *History  
of the City of Rome*,  
271
- GRENVILLE (Sir Richard),  
the last fight of the  
"Revenge," 293-96

## INDEX

- GROTE (G.), *History of Greece*, 284
- GUICCIARDINI, *History of Italy*, 284
- GULLIVER'S TRAVELS, 200
- GUSTAVUS ADOLPHUS, 286.
- HAKLUYT (R.), *Voyages and Travels*, 287-96
- HALL (Fielding), *The Soul of a People*, 297
- HAMLET, 170; the personal element in the tragedy, 184
- HAMPDEN, 285
- HANNIBAL, 286
- HARDY (Thomas), his *The Return of the Native*, *The Woodlanders*, and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, 251
- HARRIS (Frank), his book, "The Man Shakespeare," 148; on the lyric Shakespeare, 181
- HARRISON (Frederic), on the choice of books, 23-24
- HAWTHORNE (N.), *The Scarlet Letter*, 252-255
- HENRY ESMOND, 216, 217
- HENRY V. Quoted as illustrative of Shakespeare's life in London, 152
- HERODOTUS, criticized as historian, 282
- HIGGINS (John), his account of the last fight of the "Revenge," 294
- HISTORIAN, the, his relation to fact, 264-67; his conventional method, 274-75; Froude on his art, 275-277; not creative artist, 283
- HISTORICAL novel, 216-17
- HISTORY. The child of the university, 259; as truth, 260-61; the mistaken presentation of, 261-62; its bad effect on children, 261; how written, 263-64; Emerson's view of, 270-71; the right mind for the writing of, 273-74; the value of facts to, 281; Emerson on, 283; not much pleasure in reading, 284; has value and meaning only as biography, 285; compared with biography, 286-87; its true philosophy in biography, 292;

## INDEX

- compared with biography, 293
- HOMER, 26, 109; his influence on Greece, 111-12; his influence on us, 113; translation of his "Iliad" by Butcher, Lang and Myers, 114; translation of the "Iliad" by Lord Derby, 114; his "high seriousness," 114; a tale-teller, 197; the influence of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as biography, 293
- HUGO (Victor), his *Les Misérables*, 250
- HUME and Smollett, *History of England*, 284
- HUON OF BORDEAUX, 200
- IDEAL, the, what it is, 92
- ILIAD, the, its influence as biography, 292
- ISRAEL, ode to its founders, 46-47
- IVANHOE, 216, 217
- JACOB, his blessing of his sons, 46-47
- JAMES, Henry, on the art of fiction, 226
- JAQUES, 170
- JEW, the, his reading of the Bible, 52
- JOB, Book of, 60-67
- JOHNSON (Samuel), Boswell's Life of, 299-300; his way to happiness, 307
- JONATHAN and David, 15
- JONSON, Ben, his worship of Shakespeare, 154
- JOSEPH, the story of, and his brethren, 45
- JOSEPHUS, *History of the Jews*, 284
- KEATS (John), his "Ode on a Grecian Urn," 5-8, 138; his "Ode to a Nightingale," 102-103, 138; "Ode to Autumn," 138
- KING LEAR, Edgar's words in, applied to Shakespeare, 151; quoted to show Shakespeare as lyric poet, 168-69; the personal element in its tragedy, 185
- KNOX (John), Carlyle's essay on, 298
- LAMB (Charles), on books and reading, 12-13; "Tales from Shake-



## INDEX

- speare," 143; essay "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare," 143; a guide to Shakespeare, 144-45; argument against stage representation of Shakespeare's plays, 146-47; his appreciation of Shakespeare, 157; his opinion on scenery, 158; his *Essays of Elia*, 303
- LANCELOT DU LAC, 201
- LANGUAGE, its development, 196-98
- LAUREN, Duc de, compared with D'Artagnan, 282
- LINCOLN (Abraham), 285; his position in the American Civil War, 287; no real life of, 298-99
- LITERATURE, the value of, 48
- LIVY, 121
- LOCKHART (J. G.), his *Life of Scott*, 299-300
- LORNA DOONE, 216, 217
- LOTI (Pierre), his prose, 201
- LOVE, Shakespeare as the poet of, 176-78
- LOVE, Gospel of, the final appeal of the New Testament, 73
- LOVE'S LABOR'S LOST. Quoted to show Shakespeare as the poet of love, 177-78
- LOYOLA (Ignatius), 286
- LUTHER (Martin), 286
- MACAULAY, 217; *History of England*, 268; his art as historian, 269-70; Trevelyan's *Life of*, 299-300
- MACRETH. Quoted to show Shakespeare as lyric poet, 169-70
- MAHOMET, 286
- MADAME BOVARY, Flaubert's novel, 251
- MALORY (Sir Thomas), the *Morte D'Arthur*, 200; quotation from Caxton's preface to *Morte D'Arthur*, 234
- MARCUS AURELIUS, his *Meditations*, 306
- MARK ANTONY, 280-81
- MARIUS THE EPICUREAN, Pater's novel, 279-80.
- McMASTER (J. B.), *History of the People of the United States*, 271

## INDEX

- MEASURE FOR MEASURE**, the Duke's words in, descriptive of Shakespeare's character, 151; quoted to show Shakespeare as lyric poet, 170-71
- MERCHANT OF VENICE**, quoted to show Shakespeare's love for music, 171-72
- MEREDITH** (George), his prose, 200; his difference from Dickens and Thackeray, 235; the quality of his style, 235-36; the artist, 237-38; his writing, 238-40; *The Egoist*, 238-45, 247; his courage, 248-49, 280
- MIDDLEMARCH**, 250
- MILL ON THE FLOSS**, *The*, 250-51
- MILTON** (John), his organ music, 130; "Paradise Lost," 131; "Il Penseroso," 131; "L'Allegro," 131; "Lycidas," 131-132
- MIRABEAU**, 286
- MISÉRABLES**, *Les*, 250
- MOMMSEN** (T.), *History of Rome*, 284
- MONTAIGNE**, his *Essays*, 303; his own opinion on his *Essays*, 303-305
- MORALITY**, bad in novels as a motive, 212
- MORALS**. Good art a moral influence, 215
- MORLEY** (John), on the habit of reading, 20-21
- MORTE D'ARTHUR**, Caxton's preface to, 234
- MOSES**, Song of, 50, 286
- MOTLEY** (J. L.), *The Dutch Republic*, 273
- MOULTON** (R. G.), his arrangement of the Bible, 60
- MUSIC**, Shakespeare's love for, 171-72
- NAPOLEON**, no real life of, 301-2; Rose's Life of, 302; Bourrienne's Life of, 302
- NELSON**, Southey's Life of, 298
- NEW TESTAMENT**, *The*, as the Life of Christ, 297.
- NOAH**, God's covenant with, 43-45
- NOVEL**, the, its growth, 204-5; the moral novel, 209; Lord Bacon on, 210; moral purpose bad

## INDEX

- in, 919; what we want it to give, 919-13; how it may be appreciated, 924; the historical, 916-17; pleasure of reading the great novelists, 926-27
- NOVELIST, the, partly a poet, 195; his aim, 196; his art and aim, 905-8, 911-12; devotion a necessary quality in, 918; sincerity a necessary quality in, 919; temperament and character, both necessary qualities in, 919-20; his experience of life compared with the poet's, 920; how he works, 921-22; the best, 922
- NOVELISTS, the modern, 923, 925-26; what they do for us, 955
- "ODE TO THE WEST WIND," Shelley's poem, 94-99
- O'SHAUGHNESSY (Arthur), poem on the poet, 86
- OTHELLO. Quoted to show Shakespeare as lyric poet, 167-68; quoted to show Shakespeare's love for women, 173; the personal element in the tragedy, 184-85
- PAIN, 4
- PALESTINE, the spirit in which it was nationalized, 48
- PARKMAN (F.), his historical writings, 273
- PATER (Walter), on books, 98; *Mariva the Epicurean*, 279-80
- PATTON (Mark), on a library, 23
- PAUL, St., 286
- PEPYS (Samuel), his *Diary*, 303
- PÈRE GORDON, Le, 918
- PILGRIM'S PROGRESS, THE, 250
- PITT (William), Rosebery's Life of, 298
- PLATO, his Life of Socrates, 297
- PLEASURE, what it is; its effect on the mind, 3-4; as transportation, 15
- PLUTARCH, his *Lives*, 286
- POEM, a, what it is, 84
- POET, the, the duty of, 49; poem on, by Arthur O'Shaughnessy, 86; as conceived by Words-

## INDEX

- worth, 88; what he is, 89-91; his work, 90-91; what he does for us, 93; completed by the reader, 100; the universality of the appeal, 108; as shaper and artist, 137; the revealer of beauty as truth and truth as beauty, 139; our justification of, 140; the aim of, 161; greater than his poems, 165; in his poetry, 178-79; the pleasure of reading him, 180; compared with the novelist, 195; the first novelist, 197; his experience of life compared with the novelist's, 220
- POETRY**, devotional, 56; lyrical, in the Bible, 57-59; no defence necessary for, 83; is a personal experience, 83; the appeal it makes, 83-84; its nature, 85; habit of reading, 87-88; the spirit of, 101, 136; as the joy-giver, 101; the spirit of suggestion in, 101-106; the mystery of the spirit of, 133, 138; a divine madness, 137; its value and meaning, 139; the pleasure of, 139, 161
- PRESCOTT**, *History of the Conquest of Peru*, 273; *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, 273
- PROSE**, 199; the difference between early English and later, 200-1; its use, 201-2
- PSALMS**, the, 52, 54-56
- PYM**, 285
- RALEIGH (W.)**, his study of Shakespeare, 147; his opinion on Shakespeare's sonnets, 163
- RALEIGH (Sir W.)**, his account of the last fight of the "Revenge," 294
- READER (C.)**, *The Cloister and the Hearth*, 281
- READING**, the pleasure of, 3-30
- READING**, casual; no pleasure in, 10-11; a stimulation to the imagination, 11; an exercise for the mind, 12; Lamb on, 12-13; a touching of hands, 14; Morley on the habit of, 20-21; habit of read-

## INDEX

- ing poetry, 87-88; how to read Shakespeare, 156; suggestion for reading Shakespeare's plays in public, 160-61
- RELIGION, the purpose of, 34; ministers of, should be taught how to read the Bible, 41
- RETURN OF THE NATIVE, THE, Hardy's novel, 251
- "REVENGE," the, the last fight of, 293-96
- REVOLUTION, the English, 285; the French, 285-86
- ROBERTSON, *History of Scotland*, 284
- ROBESPIERRE, 286
- ROBINSON CRUSOE, 200
- RODERICK RANDOM, 222
- ROMAUNT OF THE ROSE, 197-98
- ROME, character of its genius, 121
- ROMEO AND JULIET. Quoted to show Shakespeare's love for women, 173
- ROSE (J. R.), his *Life of Napoleon I*, 302
- ROSEBURY (Lord), his *Pitt*, 298
- ROUGE ET NOIR, 220
- ST. PAUL, 73-76
- SAVONAROLA, 286
- SCARLET LETTER, THE, 216, 217, 252-255
- SCENERY, its effect on Shakespeare's poems, 158-59; Lamb's opinion on, 158
- SCOTT, fighting in his romances, 220-21; compared with Dumas, 237; *Tales of a Grandfather*, 272, 282; Lockhart's *Life of*, 299, 300
- SERMON ON THE MOUNT, THE, 34
- SHAKESPEARE, 26; his "Midsummer Night's Dream," 11; the spirit of his poetry, 105; Lamb's tales from, 143; Lamb on the tragedies of, 143; Lamb as a guide to, 144-45; Lamb's argument against representing his plays on the stage, 146-47; Coleridge's work on, 144; Raleigh's study of, 147; Harris's book on, 148; public opinion on, 149; the man, 150; Edgar's words in *King Lear* applied to Shake-

## INDEX

- speare, 151; the Duke's words in *Measure for Measure* descriptive of Shakespeare's character, 151; how he spent his early life, 152; the kind of men he met, 153; belongs to the people, 153; Ben Jonson's worship of, 154; our attitude to Shakespeare a wrong one, 154-55; what our right attitude should be toward him, 155; how to read, 156; Lamb's appreciation of, 157; the poetry of, 157, 178-79; how his plays may best be listened to, 160-61; his sonnets, 162-63; the lyric poet, 166-67; his love for music, 171-72; his love for women, 173-75; as the poet of love, 176-78; as Jaques, 180; Frank Harris on the lyric Shakespeare, 181; the man we want to know, 181-82; his pessimism, 182; the tragedy of his life, 183; his influence on us, 184; his tragedies, 184-86; his rare virtue, 187; his final lesson, 187, 189; his philosophy of the universe, 188-89; how to accept him, 190; his offer of love, 190; his greatness, 191
- SHELLEY (P. B.),** as poet, 94-98; his "Ode to the West Wind," 94-99
- SMOLLETT (T.),** 222.
- SOCRATES,** his life by Plato, 297
- SOLOMON, SONG OF,** 9-10, 57-59
- SONG OF ROLAND,** 197-98
- SONNETS,** Shakespeare's, 162-64
- SOUTHEY (R.),** his *Life of Nelson*, 298
- SPENSER,** a tale-teller, 197-98
- STENDHAL,** his character in *La Chartreuse de Parme*, 220
- STEVENSON (R. L.),** his style, 223; his essay on *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne*, 251; on a friend, 309
- STORY-TELLER,** the, his value, 202-3; our request of him, 203-4

## INDEX

- SUGGESTION**, the spirit of, in poetry, 101-6; the joy-giver, 106-7
- SWIFT**, a founder of English prose, 200
- SYMONDS (J. A.)**, his study of Æschylus, 116; his study of Aristophanes, 117-18
- TENNYSON (A.)**, "In Memoriam," 56
- TESTAMENT, NEW**, its final appeal, 73
- TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES**, Hardy's novel, 251
- TRACKERAY (W. M.)**, *Vanity Fair*, 15; his prose, 200, 217; his character in *Vanity Fair*, 220; 222
- THUCYDIDES**, 284.
- TIMON OF ATHENS**, the personal quality of its tragedy, 185
- TOM JONES**, its qualities, 231-34
- TREVELYAN (O.)**, his *Life and Letters of Macaulay*, 299-300
- TRISTRAM SHANDY**, 225, 250
- TROLLOPE (A.)**, his Barchester stories, 251
- TURGÉNIEFF**, his sincerity, 219, 250
- TWELFTH NIGHT**. Quoted to show Shakespeare's love for music, 172
- VANITY FAIR**, 220
- VICAR OF WAKEFIELD**, 200, 235
- VIRGIL**, the "Æneid" of, 121; a tale-teller, 197
- WALTON (Isaak)**, his *Lives*, 301
- WESLEY (John)**, 286
- WOMEN**, Shakespeare's treatment of, 173-76
- WOODLANDERS, THE**, Hardy's novel, 251
- WORDS**, the power of, 38; relating of, 198-99
- WORDSWORTH**, "Tintern Abbey," 20, 104-105; his conception of the poet, 88; his faith in the spirit in all things, 92-93; his advent clouded, 133
- WUTHERING HEIGHTS**, 221
- ZOLA (E.)**, his character in his writings, 220











NOV 12 1929

